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D I N A.

D I N A
OR FAMILIAR FACES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

EDINBURGH:
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D I N A.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE library being the quietest room on the ground floor, Calvert was taken to it. They laid him carefully on a sofa. He was still quite insensible, and it did not appear that anything could be done to relieve him until, at least, the arrival of the doctor. The girls continued, however, to keep his head cool by occasionally moistening it with a sponge dipped in vinegar and water.

Mr. Grange, who had met the procession in the avenue, felt Archer's pulse, and gravely expressed a hope that the stupor might gradually pass off. He helped to draw the sofa to the most convenient spot, and to adjust the cushions. Marian, who was proud of him at all times, almost forgot the patient for a moment in admiring the facility with which her massive, and not unfrequently boisterous father adapted his strength to the occasion. He moved Archer into the easiest position with the utmost gentleness, and was quite as tender in his touch as the girls themselves.

When nothing more could be done by him, he seated himself at the window to wait. Marian at the same time drew a stool to the head of the couch, and, while she watched, now and then applied her sponge to the

impassive brow. Edith, on a chair at the other side, kept her fingers lightly upon the small and sinewy wrist; and the beat of her own pulse kept time with that she felt.

There was a small French clock over the fireplace. Its low tick was not usually noticed by any one in that room; now, however, its tick-tack, tick-tack fell so persistently on Edith's ear as frequently to put her out in her rather nervous attempts to count the pulse-beats, which held on ever at some different rate from the clock's tick.

The large bay window near which Mr. Grange sat looked on to the west lawn and shrubbery, and the sun, slanting in more and more as it declined, partially touched Edith's fair head with a gleam, softened by muslin curtains it shone through, and struck directly on the sparse yellow hair of the sleeper. Edith instinctively moved herself to intercept its rays, and then, wondering if they might not help to rouse him, drew back to her first attitude, and let the light glimmer on Archer's face and brighten the white edge of the scar which crossed his head.

The keen, arrowy eyes she knew so well were fast closed; the delicate features looked sharp, and the exquisitely cut lips had lost their usual brightness. Only a slight knitting of the brows indicated the pain which had doubtless preceded the insensibility.

Miss Lockart viewed the still face with sad anxiety, and, perhaps, noted with fond pitifulness the somewhat parched texture of its skin and the thinness of the cheeks. She traced, too, the course of the old scalp wound, and, it may be, thought of the horrors of war, and wondered, half dreamingly, which was greater, the

soldier's courage or that of the daring cragsman. Then she sighed, and faintly smiled while, perhaps, her thoughts wandered away from bloody fields and lowering crags, and, almost involuntarily, dwelt for a moment on a "sunny memory" of boyish mirth upon a daisy-sprinkled lawn.

Again, with tender care, her fingers closed upon the wrist, and the pulse-beats engrossed her attention. They were still less in unison with the clock ticks than before. Some change, slow but perceptible, was occurring, and an instinctive knowledge told her that the pulse was improving.

"I think he is—" she began in low and trembling accents, breaking the stillness in the room for the first time during a quarter of an hour's silent watching.

"I saw a faint quiver in the lips a moment ago," said Marian, in a calmer, but not louder voice, after having waited a little that Edith might continue.

The Squire rose very softly and looked at Archer. One might have thought they were all in fear of awakening the sleeper, the opening of whose eyes they yet so longed for.

Mr. Grange gazed steadily a while on the white face, shook his head slightly, nodded as slightly, and then returned to his seat, still to wait.

By-and-by, he drew forth his large gold watch—taking as he did so especial care not to jingle the chain and old-fashioned bunch of seals—and compared its time with the clock's. The one marked four o'clock exactly, and immediately the silver chime of the other announced the same hour. He had, in fact, set his watch by the Castle time-gun (the wind being, as has been said, easterly) while descanting on Swedish tur-

nips to Bracy Lushet ; and his sister, Mrs. Beagle, ready to rustle to the lunch table, had done the same for the library timepiece.

The chime startled Miss Lockart, and made her for a while unable to count. Then something stirred behind her, and, looking round nervously, she saw the door slowly opening. Its motion towards her almost made her shrink, so strangely excited she felt, and then her heart gave a great bound as she suddenly thought, "It's the doctor." But it was only Polly Grange who entered. She came forward on tip-toe. Her hand was on her side, and she made suffocating efforts to hold her breath, lest her panting, for she had been running hard, should disobey the "Hush !" she saw expressed in every attitude before her.

"How is he ?" she looked rather than said.

"Doing well, dear, we think," answered Marian, softly.

"Shall we be in the way ?" asked Polly, again making a desperate attempt to whisper.

"Oh, no," said Marian, "only sit down, please."

Polly, however, did not sit down, but retreated out of the room, still on tip-toe. She left the door a little open, and her voice was presently audible speaking to some one in the hall. Then she came again, and slipping up to her sister, said, while her eyes, moist with tears, and yet gleaming from a sort of inner glow, rested on the sufferer,—if, indeed, the unconscious figure on the sofa could be called so,—

"Mr. Eagle fears to disturb you, as you wish to be so quiet, and he will wait in the dining-room till you bid him come.—And don't you think, Marian, that I— or can I do anything here ?"

"Nothing at present ; but be ready to meet the doctor. Aunt Elenor has not returned, has she ?"

"Not yet. Janet says she took Mr. Drycale with her in the brougham, so she'll have gone by the Dingle."

Having said this less pantingly than she had begun, Polly stepped noiselessly back, and disappeared, shutting the door softly behind her.

Then there was silence again. No other motion had appeared in the lips, and the youthful, yet, from the withering effects of exposure and sickness, far from chubby face, lay undisturbed upon the cushion, of which the blue-green colour gave relief to the little freshness it retained in its present semi-lifeless state.

The Squire was exemplary in his patience, and he seemed quite satisfied to do nothing but look out at the garden and into his daughter's face alternately. He knew that the approach of any one to the front door would be announced to him at once by the flight of some thrushes he saw picking worms out of the turf just beyond the north-east corner of the house. He was equally certain that any change in the patient's condition would be as easily seen on Marian's face as on Archer's own.

There was a warm interest in the gaze Marian kept fixed on the unconscious face beside her. She had not, it is true, had time to become intimate with Calvert, but, as he expressed it to himself while on the cliff, she had certainly "approved of him." There was indeed a prevailing genuineness about him which had taken her fancy. It was pleasant to her to meet a man who seemed actually to think the slightest thing he said even to a girl, when he was not speaking unmistakably in jest. The truth is, that if Calvert said it was a

fine day, he did so cheerily, as if thoroughly enjoying the correctness of his statement; and if you were indiscreet enough to speak of a dull day as a fine one, or *vice versâ*, he would not pass it over, but would, with incurable *naïveté*, point out your mistake, and banter you into a retraction of it. This would have been boring in any other man, but the airiness of Archer's tone and manner gave a refreshing touch of liveliness to his zeal that made it endurable, or even amusing. Marian had found him eager about many things, and delighted at all times to throw himself unreservedly into the discussion in jest or earnest of every topic, however trifling or mighty—he, an officer on furlough, having, in fact, nothing better to do. So she had accorded her approval to the bright-eyed artilleryman, and now, with no little friendly warmth, she prayed for his speedy recovery. But this was not all: her own interest in him as a pleasant acquaintance may fairly be supposed to have been secondary to that she felt in him on Edith's account, if she indeed supposed her friend attached to him. A girl will gaze more frankly at, and study with less bashful attention, her friend's lover than her own, and seeing him in such a state as Archer was in, she will devote herself to him with an undisguised solicitude which she is usually chary of showing to any other men besides her father and her brothers.

Very earnestly, at any rate, Miss Grange kept watch on Calvert's silent lips, and patiently she gazed upon his cheeks till one might have thought these must have at length been warmed into responsive life. And returning life, to be sure, she soon thought she could detect in them. Edith, timidly and hesitatingly, bend-

ing to look at them as closely as Marian did, screened Archer again from the sunshine, and, even while thus in shade, his cheeks seemed to Marian to have lost something of their pallor.

"Well?" said Mr. Grange, interrogatively; for an ever-so-slight brightening of his daughter's face was not lost on him.

"I think, papa, he is slowly coming round," she replied.

Gazing steadfastly at the patient again, she seemed to find her impression confirmed, for, after a minute or two, she turned her face and looked in Edith's with a kindling of congratulation in her violet eyes.

What would not Archy, poor fellow, have given to catch that look had he been awake? Didn't it express plainly the girl's thought that the sweetest sweetness of the coming blessing was Edith's by right?

"Darling! he's your own still," would have been my imaginative friend's reading of that look.

However, during the next twenty minutes or so, neither of the loving watchers detected any further improvement in Calvert's appearance.

Fully three-quarters of an hour since he was placed on the sofa his friends had waited, when, at length, the sudden darting of the thrushes into the shrubbery warned the attentive Squire that some one was coming up the avenue. Presently wheels were heard grinding on the fresh gravel, and Mr. Grange rose and turned to the door expectant.

Almost immediately it opened, and Polly showed in Dr. Wilmotte. The girls at once gave place to him, and he felt Archer's pulse without having spoken a word.

Tom Crocket, whom he had brought, remained on the threshold, and Mr. Eagle also stood there. Every eye was fixed on the doctor's face in painful suspense.

He did not tax their patience much. After deliberately studying the character of the pulse, and scanning the face for a moment, he looked at Miss Grange and smiled.

A weight seemed to be taken off every breast, and a general gasp, as it were, expressed the relief all felt. Still the doctor had only smiled.

"The bruise seems very slight," he said, after pressing his fingers on the spot where Calvert's head had bled a little. "I think we may hope to see him come to himself soon of his own accord. The attack seems partly of the nature of a fainting fit."

Archer had, in fact, already so far recovered that, as he afterwards admitted, he heard the doctor's last words,—faintly, as if they were spoken at a distance. He did not, however, move. He was more than half conscious at last, but before opening his eyes to rouse himself completely, he could not help wondering, in a semi-passive way, what the words could mean which had fallen so vaguely on his almost sleeping ear—of whom they were spoken, and by whom? He was now lying amid perfect silence, and, pondering the matter lazily, he could not doubt that he lay in bed, and that it might be time to rise. It was odd that the words, if words he had really heard, were not in Tom's familiar voice; but, after all, most likely he had dreamed them.

"Archy, my boy," said the Doctor, distinctly.

"That's funny enough," thought the speculative patient, "Ellis, for the voice is his, is not wont to catch

me a-bed, nor does he usually call so early. I wonder, now, what he can want with me?"

"His pulse seems all right, and his colour good," said Wilmotte, doubtingly.

"Pulse all right, and colour too!" mused Archer, "I suppose, then, I must have been ill, eh?"

"Why, Archer, man, don't you hear me? Rouse up."

"Ha, he's trying to awake me. I must have slept in."

"His foot," said Miss Polly, eagerly, "is moving; see there!"

"Yes; twitching a little," whispered Marian.

"Bless my heart!" thought Calvert, "those were girls' voices—the pretty Granges', I could fancy!"

The thing puzzled him extremely, but a curious habit he had of investigating any difficulty mentally before calling in the senses to clear it up—like the trick of guessing from whom a letter is before opening it—kept him quiet, and his countenance, usually so mobile, remained calm.

"Must be dreaming still," he said to himself again, "and, now that I think of it, I have been dreaming,—something about a—well, a baby, I declare! Eh? jumping off a cliff after a baby in a nightmare, as I live,—and 'twould seem I do live yet, in spite of that feat. Ha, ha, of course that suggested Ellis feeling my pulse, and the rest. Dreamed I was picked up half dead—that's about it."

"Very odd," remarked the Doctor, moving Calvert gently, in the hope of awakening him by touch.

"Odd indeed," echoed the patient mentally. "These are real fingers now, and no mistake."

Still he did not open his eyes or move his lips.

"Shall we try a shout to rouse him?" asked the Squire, taking a full breath.

"Why, that's old Grange speaking!" thought Archer. "Grange and his daughters, and Ellis, all at my bedside!"

The fancy tickled him so much that he could hardly refrain from betraying his consciousness. Still he did contrive to refrain, being determined to penetrate the mystery before he looked up. He could not, however, quite prevent a slight motion of the facial nerves.

"There! he is awakening," said quick-eyed Polly.

"The Captain do look uncommon like himself!" observed Tom Crocket, offering his modest testimony from behind Mr. Eagle.

This occasioned the sorest trial to Archer's curiosity that he had yet experienced. Tom's voice was not to be mistaken, and it seemed to place beyond a doubt the correctness of his impression that he was at home and in his bed. He could hold out no longer, and so, with the utmost caution, he contrived to raise his eyelids, almost imperceptibly, but enough to catch some glimpse of his whereabouts.

"It happened just at the last moment, when we thought him quite safe. He struck his head somehow on the rock. Duff was in the way, and we afterwards thought he must have touched Calvert in his gambols, and made him fall when he reached the ground."

This was said by Marian, in answer to a whispered question of Wilmotte's, and it at once recalled the whole adventure on the cliff to Archer's mind. He understood that he must have fainted or been stunned somehow, and that these, his kind friends, were now waiting

for his recovery in some room to which they had carried him. He would not keep them longer in suspense, and yet, too, it was delicious to lie quiet and to think over the matter for another second or two; besides, how could he deny himself the chance of secretly noting the expression of one face his keen glance had already singled out among those around him? Edith had not spoken, but, with her hand pressed on her left side, had stood a little way off watching anxiously. She was the first to notice a ray of light shooting from under Calvert's yellow eyelashes, and not understanding it, she trembled in the intensity of her expectation.

"Ah," sighed Archer inwardly, after looking at her as much as he could without further raising his eyelids: "Of a surety she likes me."

Marian at this moment sponged his brow again with vinegar, and the good fellow's sentimental mood gave place at once to his comic vein. "A pretty girl sponging his face, and a dearer girl watching; to say nothing of the tender anxiety of all the other folks present: What luck; what a go!"

He smiled, unconsciously in pure delight, and then opening his eyes, exclaimed,—

"Well, now, this is exceedingly jolly!—my kind friends!"

I will not describe the start of surprise and delight which, like an electric shock, his voice occasioned. Polly Grange seemed quite beside herself, and laughed and sobbed as she had done at the foot of the cliff when Archer had reached the baby. As for the Squire, only a dread of the consequences restrained his impulse to shake Archer out of his skin in pure over-joyedness at seeing him alive again.

"Too bad, Archy, my boy! You have been quizzing us then? When did you come to yourself, pray?" asked Wilmotte, half-indignantly.

"Well, two or three minutes ago, I confess," said Archer very penitently, but it was so odd to hear you all speaking about me while I lay in bed of a morning, as I supposed, that I could not help keeping quiet just to see what would turn up; for at first I'd really no recollection of what had happened to me. So I fainted, eh? I do feel a bit queerish in the head still."

He put his hand to his brow, as if he had a headache.

"You'll have to be quiet for a while yet, my lad," said Wilmotte, preventing an attempt his patient made to rise.

"No broken limbs, I hope?" he added, running his hand over Archer's arms and legs.

The audience took the hint and retired, with the exception of the Squire and Tom.

Edith, indeed, had disappeared before this, having slipped back and out of the room immediately after Archer's first words.

It is almost needless, I should think, to explain that she had hurried straight to the parlour—through a crowd of expectant servants, to her horror—and that there, alone and with the door shut, she enjoyed the luxury of a regular good cry. Marian, looking for her a few minutes later, caught her busy "drying up," as Polly, who followed Marian, remarked, and laughing excitedly at her own "childishness," as she said herself.

"Another symptom," thought the calm violet-eyed maiden, taking her friend's disengaged hand in both of hers.

But Polly was not able to subside yet, and so grasping her sister's arm with one hand and Edith's with the other, she made them whirl with her.

Immediately they both entered into the spirit of her movement, and round and round danced the three honest-hearted girls like children on a May-day morning.

Mr. Eagle had retired to the garden to be out of the way for a while, so they were undisturbed.

When tired, they began to talk, as girls will. They were so glad, so very glad ; but then had not the sly little fellow been laughing in his sleeve at them, for goodness knew how long? Ha, ha, it was very embarrassing and awkward for them. But then, what a bright idea it was ; and what a wonderful strength of nerve he had shown in keeping so quiet after he was quite awake. One could forgive it, almost, through pure admiration ; and yet, indeed, the impertinent man should be made to pay for it somehow.

CHAPTER XXII.

"If you please, Miss, the doctor has ordered tea for Captain Calvert," said Janet, the Ashcroft table-maid, coming into the parlour.

"I'll make it," cried Polly, "do let me, Mar, like a good little goodie," she added, turning to her sister, whose privilege it was to prepare tea even when their Aunt Elenor was at home.

"Very well, dear. Remember Edith and Mr. Eagle. Make it for seven; and on the lawn table, that is, if Captain Calvert may go out. If not, in the dining-room."

Polly disappeared like a shot. *She* forget that Mr. Eagle should have a cup as well as the rest; that was probable!

"This reminds me, Marian, how strangely forgetful I have been of my poor brother. Vidocq, to be sure, can make his afternoon tea as well or better than I can; but Angus likes me to be with him," said Edith.

"You could not have left us, dear."

"No; still I am sorry to have disappointed Angus."

"At any rate, it is too late now. Five o'clock, see. We can drive you up, so you needn't run off quite yet."

Miss Lockart, though regretting her absence from Beechworth at the hour which her brother usually en-

joyed most when she was near him, was still by no means inclined to leave Ashcroft without again verifying Archer's recovery with her own eyes. 'Twas a duty, indeed, wasn't it? to be able to carry home authentic tidings of him up to the last moment of her visit. So she took her friend's hand, and the two went quietly out.

Wilmotte's carriage was in the avenue, and Miss Lockart's pony-chaise was drawn up at the door.

"Sir Angus thought you must be detained, miss, and that you might wish to drive home," said a smart groom in explanation, when the young ladies appeared.

"You see," said Edith to her companion, "he does not like to be forsaken."

A large table of basket-work, with a number of seats to match, usually stood on one of the lawns during summer, and the Squire was fond of having his meals there occasionally.

The tea-cups were already in order, and Polly, to save time, was filling up a second pot from a copper kettle hissing over a spirit-lamp. Edith assisted her, while Marian cut some tiny slices from a milk-bread loaf, and divided a light sponge-cake which her own dainty hands had made the day before. Mr. Eagle stood at a little distance looking on. He glanced at each girl in turn, as if making mental notes, and then he slowly moved towards them—a tall, broad-shouldered man; vigorous and almost handsome, though walking with a negligent stoop, which proved that he was not thinking of showing off his figure to the best advantage. He had no hat, and his red hair flared in the afternoon sun. Polly, honest girl, blushed when she observed him near her, just as she had finished off by slapping the teapot lid smartly down, as if saying to herself,

"There, I should think they'll find that strong enough, anyhow."

"I've no doubt we shall," he said, in his provokingly intelligent way, and with his eyes on the pot.

Naïve Polly could only laugh confusedly, and, a little awkwardly, indicate a seat which would place him next herself.

He thanked her with a bow, but remained standing. He smiled slightly, with a smile at once kindly and playful, which was peculiar to him. "Poor, dear, honest soul!" it seemed to say. He evidently felt disposed to pat the girl's head, or to kiss her brow, but remembered in time that she was not his sister. "He is so grand and noble," thought admiring Polly, abashed beside him, much as Mary Melville had been, and yet with growing confidence in his generosity.

They had been much together in rather exciting circumstances during the last hour or two. Actively had they vied with each other in their efforts to obtain enough rope for Calvert's descent from the precipice. They had clambered up the hill together, sometimes on their hands and knees, and Polly, who alone of the two was familiar with the most direct cut to the top, had even offered him her hand, now and then, in her eagerness to get on. They had together hung over the cliff while Calvert let down the child. On the crest of the precipice they had stood hand in hand, in awe and suspense, while Archer was being lifted, lifeless, as it seemed, on to the plank, after his unlooked-for fall. They had raced and stumbled together in their hurry to get down. Together they had been arrested by the provoking curiosity of a lean cow, which, astonished at their headlong descent, had attempted to arrest it by

putting a horn through Polly's dress. Eagle had picked up his companion, more indignant than frightened or hurt; but no stick or stone was at hand, and the cow, a very long-horned one, holding its own on the path, obliged them to turn back and scale a wall which ran up the hill-side. They had laughed mutually over the absurdity of their position, and in mutual anxiety about Calvert had forgotten it the next moment, and hastened after his bearers to the house. There they had arrived, together, and alike breathless; and together they had waited in the dining-room till the doctor appeared. No wonder, then, if Polly felt that they ought now to be much more intimate friends than they had been heretofore, and that it was the most proper thing in the world to expect Mr. Eagle on this occasion to sit next her at table.

Probably he did not see that the girl, with all her heart, worshipped him, but he no doubt felt that for some reason his presence absorbed her attention, and he was too quick not to have been ere now aware that whenever his eyes were not turned her way, hers followed his every movement as devotedly as a spaniel's. I think he pondered the matter a bit, and didn't make much of it; but no man can be insensible to flattering attention when it is obviously spontaneous and affectionate. The "Poor Poll" with which he had at times mentally addressed the loving lass when a little bothered by her evident disposition to monopolize his company, had this afternoon given place to "Poor Polly," and that was now quite superseded by "Dear Polly!" "Dear Polly, how affectionate and intelligent she is!" he mused while standing behind the chair she had offered. Her intelligence had not been particularly obvious to him

before, but personal gratification does something to raise in our esteem those who occasion it. "She was very quick about the ropes," he added to himself, by way of explanation.

The truth is, the younger Miss Grange had more readiness than he had been wont to credit her with. He had too often been absent-minded while appearing to listen to her, and, apparently, simply because she was a large round-faced, country-like lass, he had not thought of engaging in conversation with her on anything like the footing of mental equality he readily observed in talking with her sister.

"Calvert will no doubt prefer to sit after his illness," she urged in reference to the still vacant seat.

"No doubt the dear girl fears some other person will take it if I delay," thought the good-natured clergyman, sitting down at last.

"So, ho!" cried the Squire, appearing at the back of the house, and coming up to the table, "so we're all to have tea, are we! Very right, dears; quite right."

Much to Mrs. Beagle's mortification the Squire had held out against the idle fashion of taking tea between lunch and dinner, but he was a genuinely hospitable man, and now greatly applauded the thoughtfulness of his daughters in making Calvert's cup the excuse for offering tea to the whole party.

But there was trouble in Mr. Grange's eyes; something had vexed him. Marian observing it, went and stood before him, and, playing with his bunch of seals, looked up in his face, as she usually did when wanting to know what ailed him.

"Isn't it abominable?" began her father, relieving his feelings by getting out a strong word at once. "This

young fellow, Calvert, is determined to go into town directly with Wilmotte.

Marian saw that the hospitable heart was wounded in a tender place.

"I'll ask him again, papa."

"Do so, my love. It is horrible to think of him rattling over the rough roads with his head in that state."

The "young" fellow alluded to, now stepped over the sill of the library window, the central part of which opened doorwise on to the grass like the dining-room windows. He came forward towards the table, leaning on the Doctor's arm.

Calvert had somewhat the advantage of Wilmotte in stature, as he was fond of remembering, so he looked by no means very short while walking beside a man, who, although not above five feet six, enjoyed a figure of such obvious strength and manliness, that one was not apt to think of him as little. Archer, slender and straight in form, small and fair in face, light and springy in step, contrasted in nearly every point with his firmly-set, strong-featured friend. His blue neck-tie, light-coloured tweed dress, and small grey wide-awake also differed markedly enough from the correct doctor's severely black suit, irreproachable white neck-cloth and glossy hat. The light-hearted artilleryman's easy grace and general air of careless refinement too could not have been set off to more advantage than they were beside the solidity of Wilmotte's figure and the hard formality of his desperately well shaven face and formally cut hair.

Eagle and the girls rose to meet him. He received their congratulations cheerfully at first, and then sud-

denly the sprightliness of his usual manner, so much in keeping with the airiness of his figure, disappeared, and he was silent while shaking the hands his friends pressed upon him. His eyes had sparkled when at first they rested on Miss Lockart, and detected his little nosegay of rock flowers stuck in her belt ; but now his look quite lost its vivacity, and his eyes appeared dreamy. In fact, he was giddy, and his quietness was merely the result of a slight uncertainty in vision.

The Doctor, who had not looked at him, passed on, and presently Miss Grange brought him a cup of tea. In taking it he felt half afraid it would drop from his fingers. The ready girl observed a sort of nervous tremor in his hand, and then noticed the dreaminess of his clear eyes. She quickly placed one of the wicker chairs beside him, and steadied the cup with her own hand, while he sat down with the feeling that there was nothing for it but to do so. Only Edith and Marian observed the hesitancy in his look. The former lingered while the rest of the party took their places at the table. She seemed to be holding herself in readiness to dart forward should Calvert get worse. Marian, on the other hand, as soon as he was seated, put her hand frankly on his shoulder, and looking earnestly into his face begged him to drink. He raised the cup, a vague suspicion crossing his mind as he did so that it was not real, and that the figures near him were only pleasing phantoms. He drank, however, shutting his eyes the while. The tea, creamless and sugarless, took effect almost instantaneously. He felt as if awakened, and looking up, beheld his friends, phantoms no longer.

Edith, noting the change, immediately took her seat, happy.

"A thousand thanks.—How kind you are!" said Calvert.

He looked at Marian with, perhaps, a little wonder. Her hand was still on his shoulder, and her soft, violet eyes were fixed upon him with a frankness which surprised him, for he had fancied her timid and sparing of her glances.

"You feel quite well now?" she asked, without ceasing to look.

"Quite well. Oh yes. I didn't know I was so easily upset. Getting off my back suddenly, and coming out to the glare, made me giddy. How very good you are, Miss Grange; why, I suppose 'twas you, not the doctor, who brought me round in the library, with your cooling sponge. How shall I thank you enough?"

"Edith—Miss Lockart was the first to wet your head;—not with her tears, as it happened! She dipped her handkerchief into the Cross burn, and bathed your head all the way home—you much to be envied man!"

Marian read in his mobile countenance the delight with which he heard her, and she smiled as she saw his eyes stray away in search of her friend. But she had too much tact to pursue the delicate subject further, and so, changing her tone, said,—

"You have deeply mortified my father by your refusal to remain quietly here. It would be a happiness to all of us to be quite sure of your being thoroughly recovered from the accident before letting you go."

"Many, many thanks. I have thought of it, and consulted Wilmotte—"

"Who says," put in the Doctor, who had come within hearing, "that you should get to bed within half an hour, sir."

"Attend to that!" said Marian, still looking at Archer with her calm, direct gaze. "I cannot allow you to drive off. We should be wretched with anxiety were you to leave us."

"I shall be with him again the first thing in the morning," added Wilmotte. "I apprehend no unfavourable turn, and hope that when the stimulating effects of the tea have subsided he will sleep soundly."

"Captain Calvert remains with us, papa," Marian now announced.

"I'm so glad!" cried Polly.

"Good, very good, my darling," said Mr. Grange readily. "I thought you'd prove too many for the obstinate fellow, though he held out against your father. Now, Calvert, you will complete the favour by sending that smart lad of yours back to town for your traps, and making up your mind to staying with us at least till the 12th. We have plenty of rabbits and cushats to amuse you."

Archer bowed and smiled, and did not say "No"—thinking to himself, indeed, that a lonely chap didn't need the prospect of shooting pigeons and rabbits to tempt him into a pleasant household like the Granges'—especially when it seemed to be hand-and-glove with the Lockarts'.

"The accident did not turn out so serious as we feared it might," said Marian aside to Wilmotte, while the Squire was addressing Archer; "but had it done so, I know you would have done everything possible. Papa says there is no one like Dr. Wilmotte in an emergency, and I entirely agree with him."

The good-hearted girl, fancying that Wilmotte was

looking rather sad, said this to cheer him, and little imagined that her words would stab him.

A spasm of pain seemed to pass through him, and then he looked at her with a weary expression. Had she been in the smallest degree in love with him, or conscious even of the nature of his feelings towards her, could she have thus calmly complimented him? No, assuredly, thought he.

Puzzled by his manner, she looked straight into his face, as she had looked into Archer's, and her look was kindly; but ah, its very kindliness added a pang to the Doctor's pain. She evidently, he remarked, experienced no difficulty or self-consciousness in showing her affection; and this, too, though it was anything but her habit to look in people's faces, or needlessly to display those sweet violet eyes of hers.

Sometimes Wilmotte had encouraged his heart by attributing the drooping habit of Marian's eyelid to shyness in his presence, but now, in returning her earnest gaze, he saw clearly enough that there was no timidity in her manner which he could flatter himself rose from unconfessed tenderness for him.

With a sigh, he presently turned away without attempting to explain, or explain away, the look of pain which had surprised his little friend. "At least," he murmured to himself, "it is well to know that my wishes are as yet unsuspected; and surely the fact that they are so renders the little one's calmness less discouraging than it would otherwise be."

Marian seeing that her sympathy seemed undesired, and having too much delicacy to question even so old a friend as the Doctor was, turned away also and went to the tea-table.

Perhaps it may be said for her that Dr. Wilmotte was scarcely the man to move her heart readily. His conversation rarely indicated sufficient fervour and imaginativeness to rouse the interest of a girl who lived very much alone in a world of her own creation, a world peopled by glorious myths, beside which a hard-featured and matter-of-fact professional man could hardly appear a very attractive object. Any successful appeal to Marian's heart would, it seemed probable to those who knew her best, require to be made through her imagination, and by one poetical enough to meet her as an equal, at least on the higher pathways of her mind ; for she did not appear to be of those who are apt to cling instinctively for support to minds which contrast rather than harmonize with their own.

The tea-drinking was very soon over. Archer's brain had kept clear after his first cup, and he had very soon found his way to Miss Lockart's side.

Edith, after all, had not met him very often, and had entertained him at but one of her own parties, and he, though admiring her from the first, had, owing to his romantic estimate of his supposed rival, Ralph Eagle, hitherto ventured to pay her scarcely any marked attentions. Already, however, she was not without some perception of his feelings towards her, and her manner had become softened in his presence by a touch of self-consciousness. Archer had doubtfully marked the growth of this, and, as we have seen, he had been immensely encouraged by an appearance of tender joy in her eyes when she looked up at him after his narrow escape on the cliff.

As they now stood together on the lawn, a few steps from the tea-table, neither seemed particularly ready to

talk, but, of the two, the lady was, as is usual in such cases, the more self-possessed, and, in a gentle way, she presently ventured to banter the lithe artilleryman about his peculiar management of the baby. She would gladly have paid him off too for his trick in the library, but found herself blushing at the very thought of it, and so was unable to speak of it at all.

Mr. Eagle's thoughts were not easily read in his eyes, which caught the light with a white glitter on their surface that prevented you seeing into them; but his smile was speaking, and now as he stood not far from Archer and Miss Edith, he smiled in a not ill-pleased like fashion whilst he marked the frequent kindling of fervour in Calvert's cheek and eye. There was no anxiety in his countenance, but rather an air of quiet satisfaction. Presently his eye met Edith's, with what at least seemed to be a kindly glance of approval and encouragement; and her sweet face might have been seen to brighten the more.

"Ah, it is already more than a quarter of an hour since my brother sent for me, or rather since I got his message," said Edith, regretfully, as she looked at her watch the next moment.

"Come with me, dear," she added, addressing Miss Grange. "Captain Calvert says he is to be shut up till morning, so there will be no inattention to him in spending the evening with me. Angus will bring us back in time for breakfast, or a little before it, should you wish that. Will you too come, Polly? My little chaise holds just three, but John can walk home; indeed, he had better do so at any rate."

Polly just then had overheard Mr. Eagle accepting a drive to town in Wilmotte's carriage, from which it was

evident that he no longer thought of going to Beechworth.

"No, thank you," she replied, "I mean to mount guard at Captain Calvert's door to scare the ghosts."

She had no great fancy for dining almost alone with Sir Angus Lockart, whose gravity bored her.

Edith was led off by Archer, and her eyelashes fell before his lingering gaze as he handed her to her seat. As she took the reins from him, after having put on driving-gloves given her by her groom, Calvert did not in the least remember that some three hours before, and on the same spot, he had, with more awe and scarcely less admiration than he now felt, assisted the superb Bracy Lushet into Mary Melville's basket.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I WONDER what has become of the poor woman with the child?" said Marian to her companion, as they drove off.

"Let us go round by the Gowans' cottage and ask Kate," said Edith.

Kate was standing at her door when they reached it. She had taken Maggie home, she said, and meant to keep her till Pike was brought to reason. While she spoke, Maggie herself came forward with a bright and smiling face. She did not look a bit more ashamed of what she had thought of doing than she looked immediately after the recovery of her infant. She had heard, she said, that the young gentleman was already quite well again, and she was very glad of it. Edith glanced at her kindly, and asked her to bring out the child.

"What did you say, Kate, about Pike being brought to reason?" asked Miss Grange, taking advantage of Maggie's return to the cottage to fetch her baby.

Kate told in a few words what she had overheard in Mrs. Doherty's cottage, and expressed her confidence that in a day or two the widow would be able to take the poor girl in.

Marian and her friend were struck by the generous way in which Kate seemed to have made up her mind

to stand by her rival ; and Edith, feeling that she could hardly do enough for one whom Archer had delighted to serve, emptied her purse into her palm, and, offering the contents to Kate, begged that she might be allowed to contribute something to the young mother's support whilst she was disowned by her husband.

Kate drew herself up, and with some dignity declared that Maggie was her, or, at any rate, her mother's guest.

Edith, afraid she had hurt the honest girl's feelings, looked rather confused, and Kate, with ready instinct, observing her difficulty, added,—

“The bit sup and bite she'll need are neither here nor there, Miss. Thank ye kindly, a' the same.”

Edith, not seeing her way to do otherwise, put the silver into her purse again, resolving that she would arrange with Marian to have it given to Maggie in some inoffensive way.

“What a lovely child !” she exclaimed, when Maggie came out.

“Isn't it a beauty ?” she added, appealing to Marian to prop up a statement which she felt was fully more kind than truthful.

“Poor little thing, how soundly it sleeps ! What pretty black hair it has,” said Marian, avoiding a direct reply ; for she thought the babe rather strong-featured for its age.

“Pike's hair,” remarked Kate, not without a flash of anger in her bold eyes.

“Ay, she's rael like Pike,” said Maggie, who did not shudder now at the mention of her husband's name, as she had done before her visit to the top of the hill.

She stood close to Kate, and seemed to feel safe

beside her. That Kate had strength and generosity enough to restore Pike's love to her by some unimagined means, the poor girl, in fact, confidently believed, and this on Kate's own assurance that she could easily bring the scoundrel to his senses.

"We must go now," said Edith, adding, immediately, "Remember, Maggie, I shall be very happy to help you in any way."

She was a smart driver, and Scamper, her grey pony, trotted past the noble beeches and along the short linden avenue of her home in little more than ten minutes after she and Marian had bowed their farewells at the Gowans' cottage.

"Ha, there's Duff! I had totally forgotten him," cried Edith, with almost a touch of contrition in her tone.

Duff had risen from his lair near the house door as soon as he heard approaching wheels, and made a step or two forward, barking; but on recognising Scamper, he paused, retreated as far as he had come forward, and then stood silent with a sheepish air.

Edith turned to her companion, smiling.

"Doesn't he look ashamed of himself?" she said. "He must have come home immediately after the accident; and that shows that he really had something to do with it."

Miss Lockart guessed rightly that the prudent Newfoundland had made its way back to Beechworth as soon as it saw what it had done. Duff, in fact, had a lively conscience, and being only a dog, he had not learned to distinguish between the guilt incurred by an injury intentionally and one accidentally inflicted. His gambols had occasioned some terrible mischief, he saw,

and, horrified at it, and alarmed at the prospect of being punished, he had, as in the Ashcroft avenue, lost no time in getting out of the way.

"O Duff," said Edith, patting his head as soon as he could be induced to approach her, "you are very sorry, I see; but you didn't mean it, did you?"

"Ah, but if Captain Calvert had been much hurt!" she continued, addressing Marian, as if it occurred to her that even the dog's innocent intentions would hardly have saved it from a severe admonition had it been the cause of a serious injury to Archer.

Duff was no doubt pleased to be forgiven, but he kept quiet, and showed his satisfaction only by licking the hand which had caressed him. His misbehaviour had probably weighed too heavily upon his spirits during the last few hours to be forgotten in a moment.

"Tell them to let Scamper have half a measure of oats additional, if you please, Vidocq," said Edith to the valet, who, having been at hand, now held the pony's head.

Her happiness made her eager to promote the happiness of others.

"Now, then, Marian, you will run up to the Lantern, while I look out for my brother."

"Monsieur s'repose in the garden, Ma'moiselle," said Vidocq, who was propitiated by her "if you please," and almost forgot for the moment the injury Miss Lockart had done him in being a witness of Kate's treatment of his addresses in the meadow.

Edith passed round the east end of the house into the back shrubbery, through which she reached the flower-garden terrace, where Angus usually sat when out of doors.


The whole terrace, an earthen one, topped with turf and gravel, was canopied by aged sycamore trees, which shaded it at mid-day, but, owing to the height of their bare trunks, allowed the declining sun to strike upon the gravel walk. One of those trees stretched a giant-arm almost horizontally across the terrace, and from this hung a swing on which Lockart, while unable to walk, enjoyed such exercise as its use afforded.

When his sister entered the shrubbery, Angus was seated in his wheeled easy chair on the west side of a large screen which stood upon the terrace. This screen was strongly supported by rods, and it could be easily moved from spot to spot, so as to afford a protection against the wind from whatever quarter it might blow. It enabled Lockart to sit for hours out of doors in weather when, but for it, he must have remained in his room. A coke fire smouldered in a long-legged round grate, not far from his feet, which, as an additional precaution against cold, were wrapped in a thick shawl. A small table heaped with books stood at his elbow.

Edith glided quickly among the bushes, and in a few seconds was at her brother's side. She saw at a glance that something had happened to agitate him. His eyes had a feverish brilliancy, and he was twisting his moustache with white fingers, in which there was a perceptible tremor.

"Ah, there you are, at last," he exclaimed, raising himself with an eager movement.

Edith ran forward and kissed him, as if they had not met for a month. His feeling seemed to be similar to hers, for he threw an arm round her waist as she took a seat beside him, and pressed his pale brow upon her cheek for a moment.



"I have so much to tell you," he murmured.

"I was detained by an accident to one of our friends, or I should have been home at four as usual, Angus," Edith pleaded, thinking there was some reproof in his tone.

"Yes, yes; I'm not thinking of that. Sit quiet and listen. You know,—at least you may have heard or fancied, something of the cause of my poor wife's unhappiness."


Edith was all attention. It was almost the first time Angus had spoken to her of his wife.

"I have never cared," he continued, after a pause, as if he found a difficulty in beginning what he seemed impatient to tell, "to talk of her to you, Edith, because a cloud hung over her memory, and made it painful to me to name her in your presence. It would have been better, perhaps, had I from the first confided in you; but it is needless to think of that now. Yes, yes, I see that you would have me to understand how faithfully you would have shared with me the sorrow I felt constrained to bear alone, and I thank you, dear."

He paused again, at a loss how to proceed.

"I have heard very little of Dina, Angus, and I did not know that anything like a cloud hung over her memory, unless you allude merely to the weakness, or whatever it was, which made it necessary to shut her up in that terrible House of Dawn. Pray, don't tell me anything that it will pain you to speak of."

"I have generally hoped," Angus went on, "that you and others believed Dina's illness was brought on by my unreasonable harshness and bad temper alone; but though you, dear, have thought no evil of her, I fear some people must have suspected her of that of which



I for years have cruelly, wickedly, miserably believed her justly accused by Vidocq."

"Oh, Angus, could you believe in anything that Vidocq said?"

"Vidocq, my dear, is to all appearance an honest, good fellow, and he seems to be cut to the heart by my misery, and the idea that he was the means, however innocently, of fatally misleading me in regard to my wife."

Edith sighed. She had hoped for a moment that her brother had detected at last something of the treachery of which she never could help suspecting his valet.

"At the risk of driving me mad with indignation," Angus continued, "he has confessed to me to-day that he was a credulous fool formerly, and told me things as true which he has now ascertained were malignant falsehoods, invented by a wretch who was my poor wife's maid, and who, driven furious by Vidocq's neglect of her when she perseveringly set her cap at him during our travels, let her tongue wag at last with frightful scandals about her mistress—thinking thus to put *him* to shame. He believed the stories she told, he says, and brought them to me, confirmed, as it seemed, by collateral circumstances. My dear innocent wife had, we thought, received the Count Beinhertz in a shameless way while I was absent from Dresden for a few days. Annette, so Vidocq assured me, even asserted that she had appeared with him at the opera—a thing she well knew I could not have endured, and which seemed to prove a fall I could not before have imagined possible,—and which, God be praised, was impossible, as I now know, for the strangest coincidences have occurred

to-day, and all at once from different sources Dina's innocence has been placed beyond a doubt."

"Angus, dear, I am so glad, so very glad! And yet—"

"And yet you cannot but remember, you would say, that, after all, the truth is known too late. True, most true; my never to be atoned for and most blasphemous suspicion of the purest of God's creatures hunted her to death—I did it—I—idiot, idiot—most depraved of souls!"

Edith kissed his brow, and drew his head down upon her shoulder with a tender caress, at once deprecating and soothing.

Several minutes elapsed before either spoke again. Then slowly Angus raised his head, and said, pressing his sister's hand,—

"I know how foolish this is. The past cannot be lived over again. Nothing can ever sufficiently excuse my want of faith and most weak credulity; but I must remember that now *she* is no longer the greater sufferer, and that if she can suffer still she will not be more grieved by anything than by my grief. I will not vex her with it, but rejoice rather, ah, how unspeakably! that I know her at last as she was; know that no evil ever blemished her spotless soul. This is indeed to be happy! Oh, Edith, be glad with me!"

Such an appeal for sympathy was something new to Edith. Until now the secret Angus made of the causes of his great misfortune had prevented any interchange of feelings on the subject, and had put their intercourse under a species of restraint which was very painful to Edith, and probably not less so to her brother. She was inexpressibly relieved, then, by his passionate out-

burst of long pent-up emotion, and tears, at once of pity and of joy, dropped upon his hand.

They soothed him exceedingly, and by-and-by he resumed with a certain calmness,—

“But now I must try and tell you how it happened, dear. During some weeks I have had many strange and new thoughts, and these gathering gradually to a point, at last became so clear and convincing that this afternoon I believed, as firmly as one ever can believe a truth arrived at by thought in the teeth of evidence, that my wife had been the victim of some fiendish deceit. Just then, when my brain seemed on fire with the intensity of its action, and every limb trembled with excitement, Vidocq brought over the post-bag, and laid it on the table here, with the remark that he had not been able to find the key. It happened that in an absent moment I had put the key in my waistcoat pocket. With a distinctness that surprises me now, I remembered the circumstance, and at once took it out. Vidocq expected me to hand it to him, that he might open the bag as usual, and dole out the letters as it pleased him. But some amazing instinct made me connect the bag with the conviction that had grown up in my mind. I felt it absolutely necessary that I should be alone when the bag was opened. Life and death seemed to depend on its contents, although in what manner I had no sort of notion. Trying to whistle negligently in the barrel of the key, I waved Vidocq off with my disengaged hand, and waited in an agony of impatience till he disappeared round the corner of the house. Then I clutched the bag, and, after many futile efforts, got my trembling hands steady enough to turn the lock. There was only one letter. I held it up with

a feeling of mingled wistfulness and despair. I recognised the hand of an old German friend, Schlossberger, and read the postmark—Dresden !

“ You know, dear, I have once or twice fainted from excessive emotion ; well, I believe I fainted then. Something chilly on my hand, brought me to life again, I fancy. At any rate, my first consciousness was of something cold touching the hand in which I still held the letter. On looking, I saw that it was Vidocq’s fingers. The kind fellow was, he said, feeling my pulse ; having, he explained, seen me sink as he stood good-naturedly helping John to clean forks at the pantry window. I dismissed him, somewhat crossly, I fear, and eagerly opened the letter. It was as my very soul had predicted ! Schlossberger wrote to say that he had just learned a circumstance, putting it beyond a doubt, that the story which had somehow got into German society of a certain scandal in which Lady Lockart’s name was painfully prominent was altogether a fiction. The Count Alfred von Beinherz was distinctly proved to have been in Vienna during the whole of my absence from Dresden !—Oh, Edith, could I but have known this ! Tickets for the opera and a concert in Dresden had been sent to the Count, with his name inscribed on them, and these, it happened, were given by him to a friend, who used them without altering the name ; and thus the Count figured in the newspapers as having attended those entertainments—which took place during my absence. Thus it had come to pass that I never doubted at least his presence in the town. One or two other incidents Schlossberger has been at the pains to clear up in an equally satisfactory manner, and, in short, Edith, the disproof contained in his letter of

all the imputations cast upon my unfortunate wife is complete."

"And are you satisfied, Angus, that Vidocq had no share in the invention of them?"

"Do not be unjust to Vidocq, dear. As soon as I could sufficiently overcome my emotion, I whistled for him, and told him frankly that the letter completely disproved the story he had long since told me about Lady Lockart. The affectionate fellow, with all his national *naïveté* in the expression of his feelings, at once burst into a flood of tears, and confessed that last night, when in town, he had met an old acquaintance, also a valet, passing southwards with his master, and had heard from him that the maid Annette lately, when lying ill and in fear of dying, admitted to a cousin of hers that she had once invented a false story about a former mistress, solely on purpose to irritate and mortify her fellow-servant Vidocq. He, Vidocq, had been torn to pieces almost by his feelings, he said, on hearing this from his brother-valet, and had since been vainly trying to summon up courage to tell me. While Wilmotte was with me this morning, he came, he said, to the study door, with the intention of giving me a hint of what he had heard. He feared the news would shake my nerves terribly, and therefore thought that what he had to say might be most safely communicated in my doctor's presence. But Wilmotte was, it happened, on the point of leaving me just when Vidocq reached the drawing-room; and opening the study door roughly, it struck Vidocq so sharply on the head that the poor fellow forgot what he had come for. And very luckily, Edith, for it was a mistake, however well meant, to think of speaking to me of such a delicate and secret affair in the presence

of a comparative stranger like Wilmotte, or, indeed, of anybody at all. It was a mistake; but Vidocq generally shows abundance of tact, and his consideration for my feelings, both of body and of mind, makes him invaluable to me."

Edith was silent. She had nothing definite to urge against the polite valet; and knowing well how diligently he had for the last two years nursed her brother, she even reproached herself with ingratitude and cruel injustice in allowing herself to suspect his honesty.

"Thus, Edith, from three sources at once—my own hardly reasoned out, and hence absolute conviction, Schlossberger's letter, and the report of Vidocq's acquaintance, Dina's innocence was proved. Can you wonder, dear, that I burned with impatience to give you the blessed news, and went the length of sending to Ashcroft for you?"

Edith pressed his hand to her lips, and many times assured him of her sympathy.

"It may seem strange to you, Edy," Angus continued, "that my wife, having really done nothing wrong, should have been so helpless and broken-down under a mere accusation. But I don't wonder at that myself, when I recall the circumstances which seemed to conspire against her, and the completeness in all its details of that villanous Annette's story. Poor thing, crushed by my unutterable baseness in lending an ear to such atrocious lies, and by the almost incredible perfidy of her maid, she evidently despaired of explaining incidents which are now shown to have been quite unconnected with her, though at the time they seemed fully to substantiate Vidocq's report. Perhaps she hoped time would show her innocence, for I can recall hours when her

spirits seemed to be recovering their tone, and when she would, with little Ebon in her arms, try to meet me with a smile. Ah me ! I could not always give her a kind look in return, though I loved her then even more passionately than ever before, and was unable, till she lost her senses altogether and tried to make away with her child, to think of parting with her even for a day. Some bitter word would rise to my lips, though it was gall to myself, and, with a look of wild agony, she would fly from me into the woods, to be brought back only by the entreaty of the servants who were sent after her. Ah, Edith, a thousand years would not suffice to wash this guilt from my soul ; nay, through eternity it must rankle there. I feel that, even while I am blessed beyond expression by the knowledge of her unsullied innocence. Oh ! fully it is given to me to know the eternity of remorse. Unless I cease to be, for ever and ever the worm at my heart must gnaw and the fire in my inmost soul burn. And never shall I question the justice of Him who plants them there, any more than His abounding mercy who leaves me not wholly to their stinging, but comforteth with good tidings so priceless that at this moment I hardly know whether I do not more rejoice than suffer !”

Edith, unaccustomed to this sort of language, could only beg her brother to be calm. In doing so, she spoke instinctively of his little son.

“ Ah, my blessed, blissful boy ! How I wish he were here to thank God with me. What a misery that he left me ! When do letters go west, Edith ? and when can they reach him ?”

“ At half-past seven, from the General Post-office,

dear. But what would you say to the child ? He knows nothing of those sad things about his mother surely ?”

“No ; you are right. I have left him in ignorance of them all, ever hoping to keep her image before him as that of one pure and angelic as she was when I first knew her, and as I now know she always was and shall be for ever more. Still I will write to him and pour out my heart in such a picture of her as shall live in his soul through all time. Place the table nearer me, please. That will do. I must have been biting this pen ; what a smudge ! It is needful that I write what the boy will be able to read by himself.”

Edith quickly recut the quill and handed it to him. Then, to save time, she stamped and directed an envelope while her brother scribbled with a velocity that gave small promise of such writing as a child of five years would be able to make out without help. Page after page of note-paper he covered.

Thinking to make what her brother was writing somewhat intelligible to her nephew, Edith, in her clear, steady, round-lettered hand, wrote a simple little letter to him, giving such an explanation of what had occurred as could be given to a child who had not been taught to think ill of his mother, and must never be allowed to do so. She finished it just as her brother ended his scrawl with a great dash, and then leant back in his chair with a look of exceeding relief.

She put both letters into the same envelope, and observing, while she carefully sealed and stamped it with her own seal, that Angus looked almost cheerful, she ventured timidly to mention that she had brought

Marian Grange to spend the evening. Would he care to see her, or would he prefer to dine alone? Lockart, wonderfully lightened by having poured all his fervent thoughts on to three sheets of paper, answered, gaily, that he felt in spirits to meet the whole neighbourhood, and only wished she'd gathered it round his table.




DINA.

CHAPTER XXIV.

At the top of a central square tower, containing the principal stair of Beechworth House, there is a small room usually called the Lantern. It was used exclusively by Miss Lockart. Its three windows, looking in different directions, made it a very light and cheerful apartment, and Edith had fitted it up prettily with green damask curtains and furniture, intended to make it serve at once as a private parlour and dressing-room. A trap-stair descended from its south-east corner into her bedroom, which was immediately over the dining-room, and looked out upon the shrubbery and garden terrace, where Lockart usually sat on the lee-side of his screen.

Miss Grange had been often in the tower, Edith receiving her intimate friends in the Lantern, because her brother's sanctum communicating with, and being accessible only through the drawing-room, she did not like to take visitors to the latter who were not as much his friends as her own.

The sun was glimmering through the small panes of the west window, when Marian entered the gay little room by a turret stair, which branches from the top of the principal one. Marian opened the casement, and let the light in freely. She then put off her hat and



shawl, refreshed her hands and face, brushed her hair, and, in five minutes or so, stood in front of a long mirror let into one of the wall panels, as trig a little figure as one could wish to see.

She wore a blue silk dress with black trimmings, and an orange belt fastened by a silver buckle, on which was beautifully cut a myrtle twig in blossom. Her hair, as usual, was smoothly braided in front, and pinned up behind, whence two Alexandra ringlets strayed over her left shoulder. She glanced at her image in the mirror, just long enough to see that her hair and dress were trim, and then turned away and looked about the room, as if wondering how she might employ herself during her friend's absence. A half-finished woollen scarf of a black-blue colour lay, with knitting needles and a ball of worsted, on one of the chairs. She took it up, examined the pattern, and then, as if satisfied that it was easy enough for her, seated herself at the side of the open window, and carried on the work with nimble fingers.

She remained thus occupied for some ten minutes, and added a large piece to the scarf. A pin marked the spot at which her own work commenced. Presently it seemed to draw her attention to the number of inches she had contributed, for she stopped, measured them to it with her finger, and then looked up at a bronze timepiece ticking on the top of a small walnut book-case. In doing so, her eye was caught by the title of one of Edith's books. It tempted her to rise and take out the volume.

Returning with this to her seat, she soon was equally engaged in reading and in knitting, and thought no more of the minutes passing until Edith tripped quickly

into the room with eager apologies for having deserted her so long.

"You darling!" she said, putting Calvert's little bouquet into water while she spoke, "I declare you have nearly finished my brother's scarf. Ha, ha, I shall tell him who worked by far the best-knit end of it. How could you do it so well and read at the same time? I can talk and knit, but I never can read and knit, unless in a sort of time-about way. I see you've got through half of your volume already."

"No; I began about the middle of it,—just to glance at some old friends. I like Heldigrade; don't you? I remember feeling quite wretched when I parted with her at the end of the third volume. It was like parting with a dear friend on the point of dying. To be sure, I can now listen, as it were, to Heldigrade's old remarks with the same sort of interest I did lately to Mary Loyd's well-remembered chatter about school matters when she resumed it on her return from India. But very soon Mary began to talk of things she had seen and done since I knew her at school, whereas, in opening the *Initials* again, I find, of course, only the old speeches of poor Heldigrade and Cressence, and the girls are no more alive again for me than is any dead friend when I call to mind her ways and words. Yes, when we come to the end of a novel the friends we have made in it all become as the dead, or, at best, lost sight of to us, and so it is reasonable to feel sorry."

"But," said Edith, while brushing out her long light hair, "when one has a nice short memory like mine, it is possible to forget a book so completely as to enjoy a second reading of it within even two or three years. I finished the *Initials* for the second time yesterday,

and had been as much interested about Heldigrade as ever."

"I envy you, dear. No ; after all, perhaps I don't, since I can re-enjoy one of the old hours nearly as well without the book as with it ; and memory is so much more nimble than one's eyes, that I can remember a chapter in far less time than it would take me to read it again."

"I wonder now, Marian, if that faculty will make your real friendships—of course I mean friendships with real flesh-and-blood people—much more enduring than mine, when the friends are not seen for a few years. Suppose, now, I were married, and that my husband went abroad for four or five years, do you think I'd forget him pretty much as I sometimes forget the hero of a novel ?"

"I should hope your husband would keep you in mind of him by writing now and then," said practical Marian, with much gravity.

"Ha, ha ! to be sure. But suppose, Marian, that he were to die, what would he be to me in five years, do you think ?"

"Well, if you quite forgot him, not very much, I should say !"

"And don't you think that that might happen ? You know poor Mary Loyd hadn't known her husband when he was killed in the Punjab much longer than it took me to read the ten volumes of *Les Misérables*, so that if her memory is no better than mine, need she remember—Why do you laugh, Mar ? If there had been an interesting hero in Victor Hugo's book, mightn't I have been devoted to him all the time I was reading it ?"

"I should think, Edith, that though her mind and heart may have been brought no longer into contact with her husband's than yours might happen to be with the interesting hero (not a Jean Valjean!) of a very long story, she will all the rest of her life feel a previously unknown kind of loneliness and a sad void in her heart that will keep him in her thoughts," answered Marian, looking as if she were realizing such a void with her fervid imagination.

"Ah, that is perhaps why Angus remembers his poor dead wife so painfully," sighed Edith. "It is the sense of a void in his heart which a sister somehow cannot fill. Do you know, Marian, my brother is almost as much devoted to his wife at this moment as he could be were she alive."

"From what I have seen of him, I should think he will continue so even though married again."

"Would that be right?"

"Yes, I think it would. So far polygamy is lawful!"

"What a strange idea! And do you think the second wife could get as much love as she might deserve?" asked Edith, with a look of great interest in her question.

"How can I tell, Edith? What I think is that his memory will be faithful to his wife; and that all the more from his having made her unhappy, as I've heard. He has suffered so much on her account, that his ideal of her must be woven, as it were, through every fibre of his heart, and become through long years of meditation even more a part of himself than it might have been had she lived till now with him."

"But surely he may still be able to receive a new

impression, when, in fact, he is only about thirty, Marian?"

"Well, that's middle age."

"Nonsense, dear, you may as well say that you are middle-aged at twenty, because you are abundantly old enough to marry equally with a man of thirty, women coming to maturity so much sooner than men."

"I don't think they do so a bit, except, as Aurora Leigh says, 'in the cheeks'—

'A woman's always younger than a man
At equal years, because she's disallowed
Maturing by the out-door sun and air,
And kept in long-clothes past the age to walk ;'

that is, fed on milk-and-water literature long after the age when men have gathered fruit and ashes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. My cousin Major Melville is only twenty-one, but he is five or six years older than me in experience, knowledge of the world, and in character; and I believe he would have been so, even had he not seen service and reached his majority, before he was of age! However, my father, who knows all about everything, says that though a man's mind, when he is knocked about the world, matures sooner than a woman's, he, when unmarried, may remain longer youthful in his feelings; so I have no doubt that Captain Calvert, who, begging your pardon, is probably much riper in mind and in knowledge of the world than you are, may be as fresh-hearted as yourself."

"You rambler! we were talking of Angus Lockart."

"Let me hook you, dear. What a beautiful maroon! It is quite like claret with the grounds shaken up. Did you get it at Renton's?"

"Yes ; my brother chose it one day he took a fancy to drive along Princes Street. He saw it in the window, and said it would go with my hair better than anything I had."

"So it does. Your hair is just a little dim, as you're fond of complaining, and this brings out a faint golden tinge. I think you'd better come to breakfast to-morrow with it, as somebody has taken up his abode with us !"

"Goosie, how you chatter !"

"I declare you are very ungrateful, Edith ; you'd hardly guessed his fancy when I told you of it, even though you had given him more than half your heart already."

"Oh, indeed ! my heart is still at home, and beating away as contentedly as ever,—just feel it."

"That's because you think it's all plain sailing now, Edith ; but let me tell you that Miss Bracy—"

"Oh, you will tease me, will you, just because I won't say how much I love you, as I did at the foot of the crag before the little bunch of flowers came down and told *their* story. But I won't hear a word about Miss Bracy, or any other miss. I wonder when the dinner-bell will ring. Aren't you hungry, dear ?"

"Mary Melville's coming to the breakfast to laugh at the critics, and I daresay she'll bring Bracy. Indeed, Bracy will come over to play head nurse if she hears of the accident in time. I always think she bitterly regrets that she was not one of the Lucknow ladies after that mining adventure of Archer's. Wasn't it lucky we had him all to ourselves this afternoon ?"

"Now, Marian, that's really too bad. I won't tell you things again if you quiz me so. I didn't know you were

given to quizzing one. It throws a new light on your character, indeed it does."

"You provoked me to it. I don't fancy being shut out of your confidence so soon, and all just because you've found what I predicted come true quicker than might have been expected. It makes me selfish, and almost inclined to—"

"No, I am sure it doesn't. You never were selfish, dear; and you would not balk me, even if I were to quarrel with you, I do believe. But I never meant to hide anything from you. One can't be always kissing and confiding, you know."

"No; especially when things have gone so far."

"Now, Marian, I tell you truthfully that Archer did not say a single word on the lawn that he mightn't have said as well to you; and I, for my part, just chafed him about his way of nursing the baby when it screamed so up on the crag."

"You dear Edy, how you take things to heart! You're not used to be bantered; your poor brother is so grave. Let's shake hands!"

"With all my heart, Mar. As for Angus, I think you are every bit as serious-minded as he is. That's why I think you'd probably suit him. There, it's out at last. Now, don't look alarmed. It would comfort me so to find some one who could chime in with his strange moods better than I can, who am as unlike him as a sister could well be. Not that I don't love him with all my heart as the truest-hearted brother that ever lived. But you can't say, Marian, that I try to make you feel some sympathy for him under false pretences, for I told you a few minutes ago, candidly, that he thinks of that unfortunate sister-in-law of mine as

if she were still beside him ; and I tell you now that since we arrived here this evening he has been talking of her with a rapture of enthusiasm I never heard equalled ; for you must know, dear, that he believed her guilty of something very bad until just an hour or two ago, when he learned from different quarters at the same time that she never did anything of the sort. Oh, you should have heard him—such a noble heart he has ! But now that his wife is seen by him as a pure and happy angel, living blessedly in her heavenly home—really his eloquence is infectious ! Now that at length she is seen at rest, I say, she must cease to absorb his whole mind were it only because of his certainty about her, and he will gradually have to turn to earth for variety, and for some one to fill the void which you say a wife must leave in a young husband's heart when she carries away all but the memory of herself to heaven. Do you know, Marian, I think I must be inspired expressly to plead with you, for I'm sure I never spoke half so beautifully before !”

“ I think that you are right, Edy. No one can ever quite fill Dina's place, because no two women are quite alike, and so the heart will always yearn in vain for what it has lost ; but, as you say, love, which seemed to fill the whole heart when its object was present in full palpitating many-hued life, narrows into something insufficient to sustain the soul in health when its object is seen only as a lovely image sitting afar in the golden clouds.”

“ Oh, you jewel ! that is a prettier speech than mine. So you would not be jealous of poor Dina if you could fancy my brother ?”

“ You must look out for a far nobler woman than I

am, Edith, when you hope to make Angus renew his youth. She cannot be the same as Dina, whom I once saw, and whom I wondered at, she was so infinitely lovely in her angel-like whiteness ; but there are still women who—”

“ Aren’t half so good as my own little Marian Grange ; that I know ; so please to hold your tongue and to put this pin right. I’ve been working at it this hour past, and still it won’t keep the cushion in its place. You’re lucky in not needing cushions, but you see, though my hair comes down to my waist and further at the back, it isn’t quite so thick-set as yours, or else it’s finer and so requires something to give it a pretty fulness over the neck. That’s it. How hungry I am ! What o’clock is it ? ”

“ Exactly half-past six, so you’re very impatient, Edith.”

“ Ah, there goes the bell ! Heigh-ho, I hope there’s a fowl or a pie ! ”

CHAPTER XXV.

EDITH'S aspirations were abundantly gratified, the housekeeper having provided both a fowl and a pie.

The conversation at table turned chiefly on Calvert's adventure, of which Marian gave a vivid narrative, earning thereby several kisses from Edith, which were duly paid the moment the two girls left the dining-room. Angus was in a capital humour. He applauded Archer's generosity, and expressed so hearty a desire to become well acquainted with him that Edith could scarcely refrain from betraying her delight.

He remained a very few minutes at table after his sister and her friend had retired to the evening parlour, and then, with the help of two stout sticks, he dragged his rheumatic feet after them along a narrow passage in the north wing of the house, at the extremity of which was the room he preferred to sit in after dinner. This was the longest walk he had taken for many months ; the journey from the dining-room to the parlour having hitherto been effected in his wheeled chair, in which he could drive along at a good pace on smooth ground by turning a wheel with each hand. Arriving now at the end of the passage without much difficulty or pain, he felt satisfied with the opinion frequently of

late expressed by Dr. Wilmotte, that his legs were in a fair way of getting sound.

Edith opened the parlour door as soon as she heard her brother's approach, and she assisted him to descend seven or eight steps between it and the end of the passage. Having reached the door, he gave Edith one of his sticks, and putting the disengaged hand on her shoulder, he made his way slowly to a couch placed in front of a large window.

Between the smooth straight trunks of a line of lofty beech-trees, the window commanded a broken view of the plain to the west of Edinburgh.

Not for half an hour would the sun be set, but clouds were already gathering in far-reaching horizontal lines above the north-western hills, while scattered drift lingering in the mid-sky, and even ripples of vapours in the zenith were growing warm on their sunward sides, and cooling into bluish greys on those which remained in shade.

The couch was turned with its head inwards, so that, reclining on it, Angus faced the window. Ample curtains of crimson damask and white muslin flowed over the foot of the sofa, and protected his legs from draughts, while at the other side of the window they embowered a low high-backed seat, into which Marian had stowed away her little person so compactly, that hardly more than the skirts of her gown remained unhidden in the shade.

A grand square piano stood near the wall opposite the window. Edith—having first carefully packed up her brother's feet in a shawl—opened it, and, with a soft nimble touch, played a succession of airy tunes, rather remarkable for their varying repetitions of cer-

tain rippling sequences than for marked expression. They hit Lockart's mood, and neither occasioning nor interrupting thought, soothed him into a state of dreamy placidity, very agreeable after the tumult of emotions he had had to contend with in the course of the day. On and on the rivulet of sound, babbling in light purling numbers, went softly on its way, even like "the limpid rills that ripple down green Casentino's mossy knolls," and sing the herds to sleep. Thus, for twenty minutes or so, and then the fairy fingers paused.

Would Marian kindly succeed her? Edith asked, as she left the piano, and took her favourite seat on a stool near the head of her brother's couch. Marian, half-convinced that Angus was asleep, felt emboldened to do so, and then reflecting that a change in the music might disturb him, she whispered something to that effect.

"Miss Grange's favourite pieces are probably not such as whirl off

'The hearer's soul through hurricanes of notes
To a noisy Tophet,'"

said Lockart, who, not being asleep, had overheard Marian's remark.

"Indulge us, I beg," he added, seeing her shrink into the shade again at the sound of his voice.

She rose lightly, and took Edith's place without further objection. At first, as if to continue in the strain commenced by her friend, she played a soft, wavy, humming air, rising at infrequent intervals into cheerful ringing notes, like far away minster chimes heard now and again in a breeze-vocal wood. Its language was scarcely more articulate than that of Edith's river songs, and it both lulled and awakened, lulling

while the breeze murmured through the leafy boughs, and awakening when the winds drew breath and let the silver chimes strike in. Then she passed by degrees to pieces in which some sentiment was more distinctly expressed. These were chiefly German *Lieder*, which, even when given without the words, filled the mind with ideas of mingled or alternate joy and sadness—mirth and tenderness.

They served still further to beguile Angus from the tyranny of persistent thoughts, and he smiled and nodded, and looked round at the player's face, now radiant in the level sunshine.

When at length she stopped, he expressed so warmly his hope that her stock of known-by-heart pieces was not quite exhausted, that she almost involuntarily touched the keys once more, and through a low and monotonous modulation of sweetest tones rose gradually into a rich carol of delicious sound, which, having at length reached its climax, passed on gently like a flooded cascade in fair round ripples down to a silver cadence tenderly dying away. A moment there was silence, and then floated forth a soft murmur of multitudinous notes, waving along in an almost level stream, until it became a wandering sigh, like the sigh of summer winds over meadow grass. This too died, but was succeeded by a sudden rapture of melody, lark-like, bearing off the soul into a region tremulous with golden air, till, slowly, in a soft warble, the music eddied back in breezy rounds to earth, and again, wind-like, whispered in the grass, but longer than before, and even till the ear was soothed.

Marian was so impassioned in playing that her time was perhaps not always quite so perfect as Edith's,—

Edith learning her pieces thoroughly, and repeated them with a conscientious accuracy which satisfied her fastidious brother ; but Marian's touch was the more expressive, and when she ventured to improvise (a thing Edith never dreamt of), the keys became alive under her fingers, and, in a manner inconceivable to many players, drew rather than struck from the wires such an eloquent flow of transporting harmonies that the instrument seemed to become human, and utter its passion in song, or become an *Æolian* harp, and in the tongue of spirits hold converse with heaven.

As if to give some definite meaning to the music's raptures and delicious languors, she had scarcely lifted her hands from the key-board when she dropped them upon it again, and, after a few notes, sang in a very low, flute-like voice, with clear articulation of the words,—

“ Why envy them who from this life are ta'en
 While yet, like buds that in the dewy morn
 Have newly waked to life, they still, unworn
 By time's rude touch, unsullied hearts retain ?
 For this, that they at once from grief and pain
 Withdraw, and, till the earth to judgment go,
 Will rest most blest, nor through long ages know
 What 'tis to sigh or weep ; for they remain,
 Till time be ripe, wrapt in Elysian dreams,
 Of which the soothing, soft delights, that flow
 In waving floods, do, all pervading, slow
 The passive soul entrance, until it seems
 No other sense to have save of that bliss which grows
 In consciousness of universal, deep repose.”

“ Why, Marian, those, surely, are the lines I caught you writing in the Mossy Knook last Tuesday !” exclaimed Edith, thoughtlessly breaking the spell woven by the music and the mellow tones of the girl's voice.

“ Yes,” said Marian simply, as she threaded her way

between the chairs to her old seat under the window curtains.

She was not conscious of any greater affectation or impropriety in singing words of her own arranging, than in playing impromptu airs or pieces composed by herself.

Lockart's dark eyes sought her quiet face among the shadows of the curtains, but not very successfully, for the sun, 'mid a tumult of clouds which during the last half hour had been ominously gathering round him, was now behind the topmost branches of the Corstorphine trees, by which his blaze was broken into ruddy darts, most of which were intercepted on their way to the window by the up-bending tips of the spreading beech boughs near the house.

Angus had not been so carried out of himself for many a day as he was first by Marian's weird airs, and then by her sonnet's lingering rhymes. Here was a little witch well worth knowing! But this was only a transient thought, and then his mind reverted to his wife, of whose present state Marian had possibly been not without some innocent hope of suggesting a pleasurable dream. His eyes closed, and he lay very still, while the light slowly faded from his brow as the great orb sank quite out of view behind the forest-crested hill. At length he looked calmly into Marian's corner, and said,—

“I trust the separated spirits are less deprived, even at the outset of their career, of fellowship and mutual recognition than you seem to imagine; though, to be sure, the idea of such a state as you describe is not a little grateful to one's feelings, so much does the aching heart, which has struggled wearily with adversity, long

to lie passive, for a time at least, in some tranquil perception of the celestial fields."

In his amiable moods, Lockart's voice was sweet, and his countenance refined and spiritual, while invariably his eyes were beautiful and eloquent. He usually spoke with simple sincerity; sometimes, perhaps, in more poetical language than is appropriate in familiar conversation, but always quite without affectation.

Marian enjoyed the advantage of seeing him without being herself very visible in return. The twilight just revealed his pale Grecian features, and brightened the ripples of his silky black beard. The light was that in which the dark lustre of such eyes as his looks deepest. The iris being little if at all less dark than the pupil, his glance was lurid—a "gloom of light," such as suggested the fancy that his eye was more immediately a window of the soul than an eye which sparkles usually appears. Such eyes seem to invite fellowship. In this instance they both attracted and awed Marian.

"There is something not altogether unlike your sonnet in one of the *In Memoriam* lays," Angus resumed.

"Most likely, then, my fancy was suggested by it. At least, I once read all of them," said Marian, accepting a cup of tea from Edith.

"Once, Miss Grange! How strange that sounds! It's a book to read a hundred times. I scarcely like it to be out of my reach, mere

'Swallow-flights of song, that dip
Their wings in tears and skim away'

though many of the poems are."

"I found it didn't convince me; though I admired

the poetry very much," replied Marian, blushing a little.

"Convince you! Ah, I see how it was: you had hoped to find something regarding futurity *proved* in it. I have heard that you and old widow Doherty spend many an hour together in speculating about the world to come."

Marian blushed still more, though her rising colour could not be seen where she sat. It was true that she was fond of listening to Mrs. Doherty's often strange enough talk about the unknown.

"Tennyson," Angus continued, "was a young man, and fresh from the perplexing conflict of the schools when his life was for a time blighted by the loss of his friend Arthur. The poems are mainly a record of his varying emotions during the years of his sorrowing, written

'To lull with song an aching heart,
And render human love his dues.'

Then, too, those questions about futurity cannot be finally answered by any man either in verse or prose. Now at the meridian of his genius, Tennyson probably sees no further into eternity than he did. I don't, however, despise the speculations I understand you are fond of; and, indeed, I have indulged in them to a great extent myself. I don't think they can be quite fruitless. The more each of us reflects on his isolation not only as a man of flesh and blood, but especially as a self-complete spirit, separate from all other beings, the more prepared he must be to live as a disembodied soul, or to pass congenially into the body incorruptible St. Paul speaks of."

Edith laid her cheek down fondly on her brother's hand, and looked up into his luminous eyes, while Marian, very quiet in her corner, followed his thought with eager sympathy.

"I was much struck," he went on, "by a remark of the Vicar of Great Staughton, which rather bears on this: 'Some few of those fostered by the Church,' he said, 'are now ripe for entering on a higher career: the many are but germinal souls. What shall become of them?' Failing any improvement on earth, a sort of transition place, the vicar thinks, may be hoped for for them; a place 'suitable for those who shall be infants as to spiritual development' when they die—'nurseries, as it were, and seed-grounds, where the undeveloped may grow up under new conditions.' It is the kindly notion of an amiable man who knows that in the arrangements of the Almighty there cannot but be manifest that long-suffering compassionateness which his own heart teaches him to adore."

"Mrs. Doherty believes in a transition state of preparation for the day of judgment—a sort of purgatory whence we shall be sent at last to heaven or —."

"Hell," said Angus, tranquilly completing Marian's sentence.

He struck a wax vesta as he spoke, and Edith held a small moderator-lamp to the flame. She then placed the lamp on a round table at the head of the sofa, where it gave light enough for Angus to read by, but not enough to illuminate the room fully.

The sky was now quite overcast, and reflected but little light into the parlour.

"I think that sunset promised a roughish night as well as a fine to-morrow," said Lockart. "But I sup-

pose we need not shut out a summer storm. One's sympathies seem doubled when one feels the comforts of in-door life, and sees at the same time the cloudy blatter of the rain outside."

So the blind was not pulled down. Rising wind and a commencing shower were audible, and the threatening swing of branches near the window, and the rapid deepening of the night gloom were discernible through dimming panes.

It did not appear that Lockart intended to read. The lamp enabled him to see Marian's face. Presently he spoke again,—

"Renan dedicated the large edition of his *Vie de Jésus* to the soul of a deceased sister whom he had loved tenderly, and he addresses her as if she were certainly alive and able still to commune even with his earth-bound spirit. Perhaps even Rowland Williams, too, may be inferred to anticipate a future life, when we find him allowing that his so much honoured Bunsen shared the 'hopes of the noblest philosophers' regarding 'a revival to conscious and individual life.' By-the-bye, talking of Williams, how odd it is to think that all that abuse should have been brought on him chiefly through his apparent adoption of certain views of a man like Bunsen, of whom, after visiting him at Heidelberg, our sufficiently orthodox Dr. Guthrie, not in any degree commending Bunsen's opinions, but speaking of him personally, said, in words engraven on my memory,— 'I never yet met a man of a purer or nobler spirit, and I never left the company of any man more impressed with the feeling that I had been in the presence of one who held communion with the skies, and walked closely with his God.' For my own part, Miss

Grange, I am well inclined to hold with Tennyson, that even

‘My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is,
This round of green, this orb of flame,
Fantastic beauty ; such as lurks
In some wild poet, when he works
Without a conscience or an aim.’

At the same time, I should be sorry to dogmatize about it :

‘Behold we know not anything.
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last far off—at last to all,
And every winter change to spring.’

You, Miss Grange, liked *In Memoriam* at least as poetry. Well, it is the sweetest ever penned. There is much that is remarkable in Arthur Hallam’s *Remains*, but I can hardly think that the full exercise of even his matured genius would have won for him a more enduring fame than his friend’s elegy has secured him.

‘His monument shall be this gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o’er read ;
And tongues to be his being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this day are dead.’”

The little Marian Grange had hitherto seen of Edith’s brother had sufficed to awaken some interest in him. What she knew of his history predisposed her to pity, if not to admire him ; and now the musical modulation of his rich voice, the grave topics on which he had chosen to speak, and the degree of consideration for herself, indicated in the simple earnestness with which he addressed her, naturally tended to propitiate

her not a little. When his voice died away softly at the end of Shakspeare's lines, she waited with a sort of yearning expectation of hearing it rise once more, but it did not, and for several minutes her ear was greeted only by the dull drip and patter of the rain.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE rain clouds had cut short the twilight, and Edith, who sat facing the window, began to experience those vague apprehensions—that feeling of insecurity to which timid persons are subject when night looks in upon them through an unblinded window as they sit in a more or less illuminated chamber on a ground-floor.

“Doesn’t the rain sound chilly, Angus? Shall I break up the fire to cheer us?” she asked.

Angus nodded readily, and Edith rose. In going to the fireplace she passed a screen, which sheltered the head of her brother’s sofa, and when it was between her and the lamp, she happened to glance at the window. Something there arrested her attention. She paused behind the screen, and looked keenly into the gloom—emboldened to do so by the fact that she was herself in shade. She saw, or thought she saw, some whitish object, dimly visible in the darkness; but while she looked she ceased to see it, and after a few seconds, she, half-satisfied that she had only imagined it, moved forward to the fire, carefully averting her face from the window, however, as she passed into the light. She grasped the poker impatiently, and struck it into the heart of the fire, which, having been backed with Newcastle coal, burst into a noisy blaze at once.

"Ha, that's glorious," cried Angus; "let's all draw our chairs in, and fancy it a winter's night."

Edith would fain he had added, "and close the shutters," but she did not like to propose such a thing after what he had said about the pleasure there was in having them open. However, the crackling, companionable blaze comforted her somewhat, and she drew forward an arm-chair, in which her brother seemed disposed to sit, and with affectionate solicitude placed the screen between it and the window. Angus, tea-cup in hand, limped across the floor and seated himself complacently in front of the fire, while Edith took a stool and deposited herself snugly beside his right knee, where she was concealed from the window, but could see it by bending forward.

Marian also drew in her chair, and sat, as she had been doing, with her back to the window. She picked up the first book that came to hand on the table, and held it up closed between her face and the fire.

Lockart seemed to like the glow of the flames, and faced them with visible satisfaction. They warmed his cheeks, and gleamed brightly on his brow, while their wavering light made his eyes sparkle. He put his feet on the fender, and the warmth they gathered there passing into his whole body, probably imparted to it a delicious feeling of livingness which the languor of his circulation did not usually permit him to enjoy.

"What book have you, Miss Grange?" he asked in cheerful tones, as he rubbed his hands together as near to the fire as he could get them.

Marian opened the volume.

"*Romola*, volume first," she replied.

"Ah, a most astonishing book; one positively shud-

ders in thinking of the extent of laborious reading that must have preceded or accompanied its composition. A wonderfully vivid picture of Florentine life in Savonarola's day it is! You should recommend it to those worthy folk who think all novel-reading waste of time."

"I am very fond of novel-reading," said Marian.

"So am I," said Edith, with equal candour.

"And so am I," murmured Angus, echo-like.

"Ha, ha; how nice that we're all of one way of thinking," cried Edith, emboldened by the voices, and cheered by the gay fire, which from time to time she just touched with the end of the poker to make fresh bits of coal tumble into the blaze.

Angus stroked her hair with light fingers, and patted her head kindly. 'Twas his way when he felt particularly happy in the pleasantness of having his gentle sister beside him.

"You've read a good many novels, Angus."

"Yes, dear. At least I always have one at hand. I read them leisurely, thinking, when I hit upon good ones at least, that they are too precious to be lightly thrown aside. To be sure, when I take one up for amusement, to escape from painful thoughts, or to relax my mind after some work that may have proved a labour to it, I read quickly, and lightly; but I am far from thinking that first-rate novels should be read only for amusement, and, indeed, the reading of such a novel as *Romola* is as useful an occupation as any I know of; not less so at any rate than the perusal of most histories and biographies."

"How can that be, Angus, when the story isn't true, and most of the characters are imaginary?"

Lockart was silent, and glanced at Miss Grange, as if willing to let her answer for him. But her expressive eyes were on his lips, so at length he said,—

“Histories and biographies comprise more misrepresentations of men and women than the higher-class novels do. They are usually patchworks made up from conflicting evidence by more or less astute compilers. Doubts are continually being thrown on what have been supposed the best authenticated characters in history. The true characters and motives of the actors who figure in it are in fact always open to doubt. How much they must be so we may easily fancy by trying to understand the characters and real motives of those with whom we ourselves have frequent intercourse. Biographies are defective from similar causes. We read both with a certain reserve, thankful when, on the whole, they may fairly be believed to make even a very modest addition to our knowledge.”

Lockart was answering his sister's question, but he seemed to be as much engaged in watching Miss Grange, who, kept at ease by the shadow of *Romola* on her face, continued to look at him, though not to meet his dazzling eyes.

“The work of a novelist,” Lockart resumed, “may be from first to last a fiction ; that is, not one of the characters may be an accurate representation of any person who ever lived, and none of the incidents narrated may ever have occurred, at least in the circumstances described ; and yet it may be more truthful, and, therefore, more instructive, than very many histories I have met with.”

Angus smiled involuntarily. He saw that his sister suspected him of a jest, and that, on the other hand,

Marian's apprehension kept pace with his words. In a second or two he continued slowly,—

"A writer of originality, imagination, and experience, may create from self-knowledge and from observation a perfectly natural character,—probably many and very diverse natural characters; and these his puppets he may bring together in a natural way, and make them act together as in real life, did such persons exist, they probably would act. Supposing him to do this thoroughly well, the result is a book the perusal of which cannot but be instructive."

"But, Angus, dear," objected Edith, "if, as you say, not one of the characters in his novel is exactly the same as anybody that ever lived, how can they be natural?"

"Just in the same way that you, my dear, are perfectly natural, though you were born in some respects different from other women. There is no other Edith Lockart."

Edith thought she began to understand, and tried to look, at any rate, as if she did.


"Then one needn't be ashamed of reading novels," she said archly.

"Not if they are good ones, Edy. Until you are wise enough to distinguish the good from the bad at once, you had better confine yourself to those of good repute."

"Thank you very much, Angus."

"Of a book like *Romola*, which combines the merits of an excellent novel with those of a first-rate history, no one need be afraid. The views it gives of certain historical personages being the results of conceptions formed after careful study by a writer of creative genius, they are at least natural. The honest historical com-

piler puts together a character which loses consistency and naturalness the more he tries to credit it with all that has been, with the appearance of authority attributed to the person spoken of; and the result is a representation not more authentic than that given of the same personage by such a novelist as George Eliot, and which probably has the serious disadvantage of being absurd. The most edifying historians are those who possess most of the peculiar faculties required by the novelist—those whose personages are ideals, self-consistent, natural, and therefore such as the mind may accept with comfort, though as likenesses they may be wide of the mark. Indeed, the historical personages of all great historians are ideals to a great extent, and the historians themselves are, in fact, novelists, who have the coolness to invite you to believe that their characters are truthful representations of actual people. One is apt to be deceived by their assumptions. Novelists are less exacting. Their historical portraits may be as truthful as it is possible for them to be made, but they are presented only as probable. Savonarola's character in *Romola* is a noble conception, harmonious and natural; but knowing as we do that a perfectly authentic portrait of the great anti-papal preacher is unattainable, we prefer to have it thus presented to us in a work which is confessedly a novel. Certainly the entirely fictitious characters in a novel are to be preferred, in so far as they deceive us the least. For example, the characters of Tito, Romola, and Tessa are consistent and possible, and, as such, enlarge our knowledge of human nature, while, being purely imaginary, or at least not professedly portraits of historical figures bearing those names, they do not in any degree falsify history."



"And the delightful moral you draw," said Marian, forgetting herself in her interest in the subject, "is, that histories are always, in some degree, misleading as well as tiresome, historical novels next worst, and pure novels the most instructive, or, at least, least deceptive, as well as the most charming kind of books : I'm so glad !"

"So am I, Angus ; I never heard anything nicer. I shan't feel afraid again to let you see my library catalogue with most of the novels crossed in it !" said Edith, simply.

She had quite ceased to think of the dark window, though the storm was increasing, and every now and then made a tumult in the chimney—fortunately without sending down smoke, of which, indeed, the blazing fire allowed very little to escape its greedy tongues of flame.

Marian was so accustomed to hear her father hold forth for ten minutes at a time, and so often enjoyed his speeches, that she was not scandalized by the length or even by the didactic phraseology of Lockart's lecture.

He was pleased with the humour of her inference, and glanced approvingly at her face, bright even with the shadow of the book upon it.

"We mustn't mislead my sister, however," he said, almost unconsciously associating Marian with himself.

"We," as if he and she had harmoniously been working out the subject between them for Edith's instruction, though, in fact, Marian had not contributed a word to the discussion till he seemed to have finished it. Possibly he had read a commentary on every word in Marian's expressive eyes, and knew as well as he could have done had she spoken her thoughts how far she understood and agreed with him.

She now looked a little startled, her quick mind teaching her at once the significance of his appeal. It was very flattering, and she was not regardless of compliments from such a quarter, but remembrance of the scheme Edith had confessed made her painfully sensitive to courtesies which might have the appearance of attentions.

"We have, it may be, been treating history too slightly," Angus went on. "Perhaps, in the main, its narrative of events at least is sufficiently accurate to afford us an improving glimpse of the course of human affairs within certain periods, and such a narrative with all its defects may be allowed to have some advantages over one of incidents which merely might have happened, or are not unlikely to happen in the course of time. So I would have Edith to read Hume and Macaulay, and Froude and Carlyle, and—"

"Oh, Angus, that's too bad, after what you said," pleaded Miss Lockart, with a pretty shudder.

"Perhaps," suggested Marian, "the novelist's incidents have the same advantage over those narrated by the historian that his delineations of character have."


"Bravo, Miss Grange!" cried Angus, with genuine pleasure.

"Thank you for the hint," he continued, smiling upon her. "The skilful novelist is no doubt careful to select well-authenticated events from which to devise those he describes in his story. He is, at any rate, able, if he choose, to make all his thoroughly natural, and, therefore, true to all intents, whereas the historian, poor fellow, has to grope his way through a mass of contradictory assertions, with the not improbable result in putting together his 'facts' of describing as an actual

occurrence that which could not have occurred. Yes ; it is by history rather than by high-class fiction that we are most likely to be misled into giving credence to impossibilities."

Angus, apparently, had explained Marian's hint, for she nodded in a confirmatory way, which encouraged him to add,—

"It is an infinite consolation to me to feel able to look upon the best modern novels as affording authentic pictures of much that is interesting to us in our own times. Materials for guessing at the truth regarding public events and political changes, and a great deal also that relates to private affairs are afforded by newspapers, which are indeed necessities of life ; but it is the novel that brings us into the closest intimacy with our fellow-men ; that takes us behind the scenes. It is the novel that makes national and race peculiarities intelligible to us. A sounder knowledge of the characteristics of most of the nations of Europe may be acquired in a few years from a perusal of the best modern novels published in each of them, than it is possible for almost any one to acquire by travelling. It is the novel that gives us anything approaching to an intimate acquaintance with the domestic life of the inhabitants of even our own little island. Novels, happily, are written by clever men and women of all ranks, and living in or familiar with all parts of the country. They introduce us, and in a most delightful manner often, to multitudes of people, ways of life, and places, of which but for them we should inevitably remain in ignorance. I don't say that the, so to speak, experience of life which one thus acquires at second hand is of anything like so available a sort as that



picked up in active life and actual contact with men, but it is of considerable avail, and it is likely to be immeasurably more comprehensive than the real experience of our many-phased life that it is in most men's power to acquire. To one shut up as I have been, novels, then, are priceless. What should I have known, for example, of certain classes of Londoners had I not read poor Thackeray's novels? How much mental wealth intimacy with his works affords me! From which useful knowledge books could I have gathered anything like it? The reading of many novels like Thackeray's, were they to be had, would be like the living of many lives. We who read such stories do, in fact, live, in our brief term, many lives."

Marian's eyes were now so bright with sympathetic thought that Lockart paused in wonder.

"That is so true!" she exclaimed, the moment he allowed her. "I know it so well. Often and often I have felt and been quite sure that in a few hours I have enjoyed the life of years; and, do you know, it is not always necessary to have a novel to do that? There are so many lives stored, as it were, in our imagination, that we can live a beautiful life in a few minutes by just dreaming it. And I do think that we really and truly enjoy the imagined life as much as we should the reality. Indeed, I know that I never actually get anything, or get into circumstances that I have previously enjoyed mentally, without finding it or them tame, comparatively."

Edith looked surprised, and Marian, horrified at her own enthusiasm, blushed, and shrunk as much into shade as she could.

"Capital," said Angus, warmly. "Why, our minds—"

He was going to say "dovetail into each other, as if nature had made them to fit each other," but he checked himself, fearing that he might frighten the girl.

Without attempting to finish his sentence, he said, after an awkward pause,—

"Yes, novels fully more than other books feed our imagination, and enable us to enjoy those treats you speak of, Miss Grange. Mental pictures are always necessarily framed out of acquired knowledge, or suggested by it. The illiterate rustic confined to a few fields, and to intercourse with people situated like himself, can enjoy in fancy only such imaginary lives as his circumstances are fitted to suggest."

Edith had now become, in a great measure, heedless of the subject of conversation, and was chiefly occupied in observing the interest Marian and Angus might be taking in each other. There was an earnestness in her brother's gaze as he watched the effect of what he said on Marian, that Edith knew to be an indication of feeling; and the way in which Marian seemed alternately carried away by her interest in his remarks, and confused by sudden remembrance of who was the speaker, showed, Edith thought, how readily she might fall under Lockart's influence.

Edith felt very happy. She had a tender regard for Marian, a regard which had been deepened by recent incidents we wot of, and, loving her brother, she felt the heartiest desire to see him blest by a union with her friend.

And, indeed, there was more than at first sight appears in a conversation such as that I have reported to draw Angus and Marian together. Men are every day won by the apparent reverence of women. Nothing

propitiates them more than the subtle flattery conveyed in evident appreciation of the good or high qualities with which self-love makes them ever ready to believe themselves gifted. Marian was unaffectedly impressed by Lockart's manner and fluent speech, and her sympathy was too evident to escape his attention. Hence a pardonable self-complacency blended with his delight in the sweet countenance of the lovely girl. But if men are won by the reverence of women, still more propitiated are young women by the unaccustomed reverence of men of whom they have reason to think highly. With a pleasure she did not pause to analyse, Marian felt that Lockart addressed her with a consideration which was quite distinguishable from that air of deference which is prompted by gallantry, or by merely generous attention to the feelings of the person addressed. Instead, therefore, of being wearied by his speeches, she was flattered, and instead of being scandalized by his deliberate exaggerations, they were a source of gratification to her, perceiving as she did Lockart's perfect confidence in her ability to distinguish them. In short, hearts have been lost and won with much less excuse than Angus and Marian would have had this evening for conceiving a certain interest in each other.

Tears moistened Edith's blue eyes as in a somewhat misty way she thought of this.—But suddenly her pleasant dream was for the moment cut short.

"Can the house be falling, Angus?" she cried in alarm, and starting to her feet as she spoke.

"My fawn," said her brother tenderly, as he took her hand and drew her to his side. "Does it not know the boom of distant thunder yet?"

"I wish it wouldn't thunder," she said, glancing at the unblinded window.

The black night lowered upon her unpleasantly again. The fire was giving a quieter light, and the lamp burned clearly. The old feeling of insecurity came back upon Edith, as she looked at the window with renewed consciousness of the fact that any one outside could stare into the room deliberately without being seen in return. Again, she thought that she could dimly discern something whitish; and this time it seemed in motion, and seemingly retiring from the window. Her hand trembled in her brother's, and she would fain have withdrawn her eyes from the darkness, and hidden herself once more behind his knees, but she felt as if spell-bound, and with straining eyes she continued to gaze at the spot where the object had last been distinguishable.

The rain was now coming down in torrents, and the thunder sounding nearer at every peal.

Marian turned to the window, wondering if it was something she saw there, rather than the approaching thunder, that frightened Edith. Lockart, too, raised himself in his chair, and looked past the screen out upon the inky night.

"Oh, don't look," said Edith faintly, though unable herself to refrain from looking.

At the same moment there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed, after a brief interval, by a rattling peal that seemed to shake the house to its foundations. The flash lit up the landscape for an instant with the brilliancy of day, and under the thickest part of a leafy tree a few yards from the house, and just about the spot where Edith had lost sight of the thing that alarmed her, a man was visible. He stood close against the

trunk, as if seeking shelter from the rain and wind. Darkness followed the flash, and Edith, with a shiver, dropped on her knees, pulling Angus down with her.

"My poor Edy," said her brother, drawing her head to his side, "I never saw you so frightened by lightning before. We must close the shutters."

He made a movement as if to rise, but Marian, remembering his lameness, jumped up and pushed forward the massive shutters before he had time to remonstrate.

"The bolt, Mar," cried Edith.

Marian fastened the bolt, and then returned to her seat, smiling.

"If the lightning should have a mind to come in, it won't heed the bolt, I fancy," she said.

"It wasn't the lightning I was thinking of," said Edith, sitting up, and trying to overcome the quaking of her heart. "Didn't you see him under the tree as plainly as possible?"

"Whom, Edy? There was a person under a tree. One of the grooms caught by the heavy plump when trying to cross the green, perhaps," replied Angus.

"It was Vidocq," said Edith, scarce audibly.

"I felt, all the time the shutters were open," she added, still more indistinctly, "that there was some one out there watching us. It was such a horrid feeling!"

"My poor lassie, if you had only spoken, the shutters would have been closed at once."

"Thank you, Angus, but I didn't like to disappoint you. I suppose I am very silly, but I can't help fearing that man Vidocq. One never can guess what he's after. What could he mean by standing out in a dark wet night to stare in at us?"

"You're sure it was Vidocq? Well, suppose Vidocq

did look in, it is easy to account for his doing so ; though he'd better have found an excuse for coming into the room, I admit. You forget that I to-night walked from the dining-room for the first time. Doubtless Vidocq observed my wheel-chair undisturbed in the passage, and, with his usually affectionate interest in me, he peeped in at the window to see how I was standing the fatigue. I sometimes see a strange likeness in you, my child, to my poor wife. She, too, disliked Vidocq, and once almost induced me to part with him, though the kindly fellow was even more devoted to her than to myself—so he said at least,—and went about with red eyes for weeks after the sad disclosures I spoke to you of this afternoon. I never saw any one more cut up by his feelings. Then to-day, when my darling's fair fame was so happily restored, he seemed beside himself with grief—unable to enjoy the blissful news through misery at the thought of the share he had unwittingly had in spreading the horrible calumny."

Edith did not look convinced. As for Marian, she had once or twice noticed a glance of what looked very like vindictive jealousy of herself in Vidocq's eyes, even when his manner was deferential to slavishness, and this had occasioned a certain distrust of him which made her feel now that Lockart, with all his cleverness, was not improbably imposed upon by his valet. However, she was not apt to be uncharitable, and as she had never imagined any reason why Vidocq should dislike herself, she felt it wrong to feel sure that his politeness was hypocritical, and a thing the remembrance of which should make her hesitate in accepting Lockart's view of the present incident.

His thoughts reverting to old times, Angus felt no

inclination to chat any longer with his sister and her friend. Edith, seeing that his brow had become overcast, suggested that it was now bed-time.

"Well, good-night, my dear," he said. "Good-night, Miss Grange. Don't forget to have a novel under your pillow! Ring for Vidocq, Edy. Thank you. Good-night,—what a shattering peal!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"WHEN my brother praises Vidocq so warmly—" Edith began, as she and Marian were wending their way up the tower stair; but before she had time to continue the sentence, Vidocq, hastening to answer Lockart's bell, came from a door leading to the servant's quarters.

He bowed low and stood back while the girls passed on. More graceful civility never was seen; and deferential regard for his master's sister could scarcely have been more strongly expressed than it was by the valet's gravity.

"Wasn't it lucky he did not meet us a moment later," said Edith, almost in a whisper, when she and her friend had reached the Lantern, and carefully shut themselves in, "since I was on the point of saying, that when Angus speaks so of him I am always at a loss whether to think he is simple, or is speaking ironically? Sometimes I fancy that he quite sees through the man, and plays with him with some secret object in view, while at other times I can hardly help believing that he sincerely thinks all the good he says of him."

"My ear seemed to catch a sort of suppressed bitterness in your brother's tones; such as one would expect to hear in ironical praise," said Marian, thoughtfully.

"I'm so glad you felt that. I should be quite easy if I thought Angus understood Vidocq; who, by the bye, must have come into the house the moment you closed the shutters."

"The bitterness in his tone, Edith, was when he spoke of Vidocq's regard for Lady Lockart. Perhaps he has reason to think that Vidocq was not sincere in that."

"You are very quick, Marian. It is certain that Vidocq told Angus some wicked story about Dina, and Angus may suspect that he did more than merely retail it. For my part, I could easily believe him at the bottom of all Lady Lockart's misfortunes. He may have known that she tried to have him put away, and one can see that he is revengeful. Ah! what a flash!"

"Let us put out the candles and watch the lightning," said Marian, drawing up the blind of one of the front windows.

Edith, after a momentary hesitation, looked out a match-box, and having placed it on the table to be at hand, she extinguished the candles, and seated herself, perhaps a little timidly, beside Marian at the window.

The storm seemed to be concentrated over the fields a short distance north of the house, but some of the thunder-peals were so violent and prolonged, that they rattled right over the old roofs of the house like batteries of artillery, and shook the window-sashes.

"Oh, did you see that?" cried Marian, almost with a gasp.

It was worth seeing that flash: every wet leaf on the avenue trees sparkled like a jewel, and, for the moment, the wood had all the weird splendour of fairyland; and then what a dread intensity there was in the utter blackness of darkness which succeeded!

"Beautiful!" said Edith, forgetting the destructive character of the dazzling fire which now every few seconds scribbled fantastic lines on the dark tablets of the sky.

"How the thunder rolls!" remarked Marian, after they had sat for several minutes at the window.

"Yes, dear; the storm has almost passed us now."

The charged cloud had come up to, and was already retiring from the house towards the Pentlands.

"Look," Edith continued, "now we see only the glare on the trees. The darting forks are behind us. But for the danger, I'd wish them not to go away so soon."

"One would run just about the same risk anywhere else," said Marian, "otherwise I should be afraid to sit here."

"I don't know that," replied her friend, "they say lightning is most apt to strike the highest objects, and this tower is higher than the roof of the house."

"But many of the trees are higher still, Edy. Ah!"

The exclamation was caused by a sharp explosion and sudden jingle of metal in the fireplace, followed by the falling of something on the floor, and what sounded like the instantaneous splintering of the door leading to the turret stair.

A parting shot from the elemental battle had entered the chimney, and, as it seemed, exploded like a shell in the grate, but unlike a shell, had gathered itself up again, and plunged through the door. For a single instant only, the room had been illuminated by the deadly visitant, and in the total darkness that followed, the extent of the mischief done could not be seen.

The girls were unhurt, and tightened their arms round each other to make sure that such was the case.

They both quaked miserably, and hardly dared to breathe. Presently a ghastly gleam of pallid light, shed by a distant flash, showed them the grate and door lying in fragments.

"Marian!"

"Edy, dear!"

They shuddered mutually. A few minutes passed thus, and then it was evident that the storm had gone quite away from the house, and was raging over other homes.

"We, at least, are safe," said Marian; "but your brother?"

"Oh, let us go, dear, and look for him; do come with me," said Edith.

They got up, and with their arms still encircling each other, advanced tremblingly.

"Not that way, dear," whispered Edith, holding back her friend, who was guiding her with feeling steps towards the turret stair.

Edith thought that the lightning, having broken the door, had probably darted down the stair, and she had no mind to follow it!

"We must go by the trap into my room."

Neither seemed to wish for a light as they groped their way singly down the sort of ladder stair that connected the tower-room with Edith's bed-chamber. The boom of occasional thunder still reached them, and in the darkness they vaguely imagined themselves hidden from the storm. From Edith's room they passed, feeling their way, into the principal stair, and by it to the drawing-room floor, on which Lockart slept. A few feet of passage brought them in front of his door, which stood ajar. The room seemed to be lit by intermittent

flames, and not far from the door they saw Lockart standing supported by his sticks, and looking alternately at the corner of the room whence the light proceeded, and at a curled-up figure near him. The figure was that of Vidocq, who, seemingly palsied by fear, lay on the floor. A somewhat sardonic smile played on Lockart's lips.

"Angus!" exclaimed Edith, almost with a scream.

He turned, and instantly his expression changed.

"Ring the great bell," he cried imperatively.

Edith retreated instantly, followed by Marian, and together the girls pulled at a rope in the stair-case, which communicated with an iron bell hung over the roof of the tower. No sound followed their pulling. Their efforts were redoubled, but still no bell jangled above them.

"The lightning must have struck it," said Edith in dismay.

But the flaring light within the window of Lockart's room had already spread alarm outside, and knocks, redoubled impatiently, sounded from the house door. Edith and Marian hurried down, and had unlocked the door before any of the house domestics were roused by the noise. The coachman and two grooms entered breathless, and, scarcely waiting for Edith's orders, stumbled up the stair.

When the girls got back to Lockart's door they heard the hissing of water falling on fire, and the men were rushing in and out of the room with wash-basins, which they got filled with water at a tap in the passage. Angus stood near the door still, and directed their efforts, without visible excitement. The alarm and agitation of others always cooled him. He stopped

each man as he entered, and so judiciously indicated the spot where the water would be most effective, that very soon the room began to darken, and volumes of smoke and steam to replace the flames. One of the grooms was about to throw up the window-sash to let out the smoke, but Angus caught him with his stick handle and turned him back to the door. It was just the moment when a draught would have been fatal. The smoke, however, was growing so dense that it was no longer possible to remain in the room. Angus limped out of it and stood in the passage, giving instructions for occasional rushes in with basins of water.

The diligence of the men, and his calmness, were soon rewarded, and the fire was extinguished entirely.

Edith and Marian had kept beside the tap, ready to supply water as each vessel was returned.

It was Lockart's bed which was consumed, and that almost completely—just the thicker wood-work being left, a charred wreck.

"Where's Vidocq?" asked Angus, when it began to be doubted what should be done next.

The maid-servants had arrived on the scene with lighted candles, just as the flames were subdued, and their lights showed that Vidocq was not present.

"Look in the room," said Lockart, with a smile which seemed singularly timed.

The room was so full of smoke that at first nothing else could be seen; but presently one of the grooms went in holding his breath, and stumbled upon Vidocq, still curled up on the floor. Unfortunately, he felt forced to breathe before he could lay hold of the valet, and so had to retreat empty-handed. A moment after, however, he re-entered with the coachman, and Vidocq

was dragged forth by the arms with scant ceremony. He was quite stupified, having in his real or affected gasps of terror breathed smoke till he was nearly suffocated. He was laid in the passage near the tap, and water in abundance was poured on his face.

The scene was peculiar. The passage being too small for the group, the young ladies had retreated to the stair, leaving the stable-men busy about Vidocq, Angus bending over them, and the maids flattening themselves against the walls, while they held out their candles to light Vidocq's figure. The hurried toilets of the cook and housemaid were not such as I shall attempt to describe, but Lockart's dress was simplicity itself. He had just got into bed when the fire broke out, and he now wore a white cotton nightcap, a thick white cotton gown, which reached his ankles, and red woollen stockings, the latter necessitated by the rheumatic state of his feet. Oddly enough, he did not appear conscious of the slightness of his attire, and the excitement of those about him had been so great that it was not till the valet seemed to be coming to himself that even Edith noticed that her brother was running a risk of catching cold. The moment she did so, she sprang up the stair, darted into her room, and in a few seconds appeared again with a shawl, which she wrapped carefully round Lockart's shoulders. He thanked her softly, stooping over his stick to feel Vidocq's pulse as he spoke to her.

"He'll do now, Sir Angus," said the coachman, throwing a final and quite unnecessary dash of water in Vidocq's face—by way of finishing him off handsomely, as he afterwards remarked in private to the cook.

Lockart's observant eyes lit for an instant on the

coachman, whose feelings he seemed to penetrate, and then he spoke kindly to the valet in French.

Vidocq, blinded by the water and by the smoking candles held to his face, had probably but a vague idea of his whereabouts for a while ; but his quick wit soon served him, and he was profuse in his apologies for the trouble he had given, and earnest in his entreaty to be told if any one had been injured by the lightning.

Lockart, smiling blandly, very graciously assured him that all the household, in which he took such a warm interest, had escaped the lightning—and the fire.

Vidocq, quite extinguished by a suavity greater than his own, lost colour and looked uneasy, but only for a moment, for Lockart immediately began giving him directions about getting another bed ready, and then turned to one of the grooms, whom he ordered to make sure again that the fire was quite out.

Edith now offered her arm to assist her brother to the room he proposed to occupy. It was on the same floor, and opened from the long passage leading to the evening parlour. A maid was already kindling a fire in the grate when Edith pushed open the door, and almost immediately afterwards Vidocq entered, and wrapped Sir Angus in his dressing-gown.

There was a sofa at the foot of the bed, and Edith sat on it beside her brother while the fire was being urged to burn, and the bed was being hurriedly made up.

“What a puzzle you are, Angus dear,” she whispered, “I should have expected you to get excited, and instead of that you looked more at ease than usual.”

Angus smiled as peculiarly as he had done in the

room while looking from the fire to Vidocq, and merely said in reply,—

“I was so much interested !”

Having seen his new room made comfortable, Edith kissed him affectionately and withdrew.

She found Marian in the tower with a candle in her hand, and quite absorbed in the contemplation of the shattered door and broken grate.

“Isn’t it odd ?” said Marian, looking up as her friend entered. “One might fancy a couple of genii had been wringing the door as washerwomen wring a blanket ; the grate is actually broken into several pieces, and the limbs of the tongs are twisted round each other. I wonder how lightning does such things. Then it must have darted down the staircase and into your brother’s room, though without breaking his door.”

“It would naturally go along the key,” explained Edith gravely ; “and then it would make a leap to the bed. Oh, Mar, I’m so thankful, so thankful !”

“Well may we all be so, Edy. How strange it is that the lightning should have come so near, without touching any of us in the least ! Do you think, dear, that it would be as bad at Ashcroft, the storm ?”

Edith felt her companion’s shoulder trembling against her own.

“I think not,” she replied, “the storm came from the north, and passed away southwards.”

That was also Marian’s impression, so she felt reassured. Stepping somewhat fearfully over the *débris* on the floor, Edith now grasped the tumbler of water containing Archer’s nosegay, and then, leaving everything else undisturbed, took Marian’s hand and retired with her to her bedroom by the trap stair.

Marian began at once to prepare for bed, but Edith appeared to have something else to do. She opened a drawer, and after rummaging for some time, found a book of blotting paper. Taking this to a table, she placed a candle beside it, and, seating herself, began, a little tremulously, to untie her bunch of flowers. The water they had stood in for a few hours had somewhat revived them, and they seemed in a fair state for pressing. One by one Edith spread them out on the leaves of her book. The forget-me-nots obtained her particular attention, but not the smallest leaf or grass-blade even was neglected, and last of all she carefully smoothed out and placed beside the forget-me-nots the card on which the cragman had written "Edith." This done, she placed the blotting-book under a heavy dressing-case which stood on the table, and then, viewing her work, gently rubbed her hands together.

When half undressed Marian had betaken herself to one of the room windows, and there she stood, calmly studying patches of drift which ever and anon crossed the disk of a nearly full moon. The greater part of the sky was already clear, and bright stars shone in the grey-blue vault with a clearness which seemed to lessen and increase with the unveiling and veiling of the moon, as the cloudlets scudded over it, and obscured or let forth its light.

"Such a lovely night it is!" said Marian, seating herself as if to remain at the window.

But Edith, having safely disposed of her precious bouquet, had now leisure to observe how nearly unclothed her friend was. Without much ceremony she caught the star-gazer round the waist, gave her an

admonitory shake, and then led her off to the bed—into which she was not long of disappearing herself.

“Didn’t Angus look beautiful above his white gown?” she presently inquired.

“He looked very tall,” says Marian.

“But didn’t he look interesting with his mysterious eyes?”

“He seemed very pale.”

“I never admired him more, Mar; did you?”

“His nightcap was inside-out.”

“Bother! I’ll go to sleep.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE storm was strictly local, and whilst it raged over Beechworth House, the moon shone serene from a cloudless sky upon the yellow sands which stretch southwards from the little fishing village of Oden, on the west coast of Argyleshire.

Those sands look beautifully yellow in daylight, especially when the sun is shining, and it does not require a poetical eye to make one regard them as golden even when they are seen only by the light of the moon, though certainly she in transmitting to us her borrowed light either reserves some of the sun's coloured rays for her private use, or sends them on to us in a very enfeebled condition.

Many more stars than Marian Grange saw from her friend's chamber window were about the same hour visible from Oden Bay. There, scarcely a cloud-flake hid any part of the sky, of which the blue, though dark and solemn, had something of the clearness of noonday azure. So clear, indeed, was the atmosphere that stars usually lost in the more vivid radiance of a brilliant moon were distinctly visible, twinkling in multitudes, to the eyes of two youngish women whose feet left lonely prints upon the crisp and wave-rippled beach.

"We have so often been disappointed," said the


younger, though the taller of those women, "that I hardly feel confident of his having left Beechworth this morning. Do you think we shall have news of his setting out before we actually see him?"

"Well, that thoughtless post-boy has lost himself on the moor so often of late that our darling may arrive before the letter Edith would write the moment she saw him fairly off."

"Dear Edith! how unfailing her patience with us has been. And to think that I should hardly recognise her if I saw her standing here!"

The elder lady, who seemed under thirty, spoke in well-rounded English, and with a certain fulness of tone indicative of robust health and a country life. The younger's voice was lower, softer, finer, and somewhat feeble, as if from delicacy of constitution. Her age certainly did not exceed five-and-twenty, though either time or suffering had somewhat marked her brow.

The elder was stout, flaxen-haired, and rather handsome. The younger was very beautiful. A vivid loveliness of countenance was accompanied by a faultless symmetry in the form of her face. There is nothing in such a face for the caricaturist to lay hold of, and the painter and scribe are alike at fault in their attempts to depict it with that definite individuality necessary to make their sketch of it at once recognisable. The lady's eyes were brown but not very dark, and they were fringed by long and silky eyelashes of nearly the same colour. Her hair was also brown, and neither was it dark, but of that medium tint which leaves you at a loss whether to class its owner among the blonds or the brunettes. The lady's head was no less gracefully pro-



portioned than her face. It was small, but full and broad enough in front to indicate an intellectual and imaginative cast of mind. Similar refinement of organization distinguished her figure. She was tall; slender without absolute thinness, and small boned without more appearance of fragility than is necessarily associated with an exquisite delicacy hardly compatible with great bodily vigour.

The sands had been firmly laid by the last tide. They afforded capital footing, each step leaving only a very shallow, though sharp-edged impression. The younger lady's footprints were small and narrow, and scarcely deeper than the crust formed by the drying of the surface sand. Those of her companion were larger, and indicated a less elastic step.

The ladies walked slowly along, arm-in-arm—the sea on their right, and a broken coast-line of sandy bluffs, with grass and heather-topped knolls, on their left.

They wore long grey cloaks of light alpaca wool; the younger a bonnet, and the elder a Leghorn hat with broad and wavy rims. The alpaca cloaks shone with a silvery shimmer in the light, which played upon their moving folds as their graceful wearers glided on. The bonnet and straw hat looked pale, while the ribbons which bound them just confessed their colours. The slender lady's lovely face was of a pearly whiteness where the moon tenderly lit it, and it looked strangely pale beside that of her warmer-blooded companion.

The linked figures which advanced along the beach were thus in keeping with the lights and shades, and the subdued colours around them. They seemed to associate themselves naturally with the glistening shore, the metallic grey and the diamond sparkle of the

scarcely rippled sea, the lights and shadows of the broken banks, and even with the obscure tints of the bent and heather knolls.

The placid bosom of the tranquil sea, in a slow and languid way, rose and fell. But the ground-swell of the waters, like gentle breathing, was sometimes barely perceptible; and now and then the reflection of the moon crossed the southern extremity of the bay in almost a straight and unbroken line to the ladies' feet. Even when the sea is in such a restful mood, the tide will not, however, allow it soundly to sleep anywhere along the shore, save where the land meets it abruptly, and straight-breasted cliffs silently face it. On the scarcely sloping sands the water played with shells and weeds in a restless yet contented way. Like a child left on the floor to amuse itself with its bricks and marbles, it seemed satisfied to do the same thing over and over again for a long time, and to find in a continuous murmur and low chatter to itself sufficient relief from the monotony of its game.

For a while the ladies had met their own outward-bound footprints, but the waves were now more and more washing over the line they had followed in their walk from home, and they had to keep higher and higher on the shore.

The beautiful lady gazed oftener at the sky than over the far-reaching sea, but neither the moon nor the mysterious heavens seemed really to engage her attention. It was most likely a way she had, that fashion of turning up her sweet face, and her mind was probably occupied about her own affairs. When she thus looked up, her walk generally became slower, or she would pause and stand for a little, as if anxious to see

steadfastly the object on which her mind's eye was fixed.

"Long ago, Dina, my love, you told me that it was in such a night as this that you made your wonderful escape," said her companion, drawing close to her side the light hand which rested on her arm.

"It was in such a night," said the younger lady after a little, her glance falling as she spoke, and shining forth level towards the horizon.

They stood together facing the sea. The moon was pretty high in the heavens to their left, and the beach vanished away in obscurity on either hand. There was scarcely wind enough to shake into sparkles the shivering little heaps of gossamer foam left by the retreating tide, and there was nothing louder than the wash of the water over stray fragments of sea-weed, and the light-ringing jingle of the shore shells under the brisker runs of the unwearied wavelets, to break the silence.

"The light would help and encourage you, dear," suggested the first speaker, as if to draw from her friend some story, imperfectly told hitherto.

"It helped me very much," was the low reply.

"Was the moon far up in the heavens, as now?"

"At first, dear, it was just rising, large and red, at the horizon, but all the rest of the night it shone bright and pure. I have often seen it in my dreams as I know it must have looked to me every time I lay down in the grass or corn to rest."

"Poor child!"

"The first thing it showed me when I opened my window in House of Dawn, was that man whom Angus had sent to take me to him. He was coming along the shore, slipping on the slime, and looking up at me. I

knew his dress—the whitish overcoat he wore in the boat which had brought him across the river in the evening. It is very strange that I should remember every thing that happened, seeing that I was, they thought, out of my mind then. Do *you* think I was so?”

“No, darling, you were not. You broke down in a sort of way soon after your arrival here, when you had no longer to toil for your escape, but that was from fatigue. Three days such as you must have passed, were enough to half kill almost any woman. As soon as you were rested, that is, in a few weeks, your mind recovered its tone with every daily increase of your strength.”


“But the doctors were kind, and would not have kept me prisoner had I not been mad.”

“You were as sane as I am, my own love, when you knocked at my door at sunrise, and told me why you had fled, and made me promise by our mother’s soul to hide you. It was only when prostration of the whole system, consequent on your hard and exciting journey came on, that you sank, and ceased to know yourself or me. Ah, what a burden the oath was then! and yet now I know that no one could have done more for you than God enabled me to do here and alone.”

“Sister mine!”

Again the ladies moved slowly along the beach. They were accustomed to moonlight walks, though it might be doubted if the more fragile of the two would be benefited by the night air.

“You have been too reticent for your good hitherto with me, my pet,” continued the elder. “The time is fast coming when it will be necessary at all hazards to let it be known that you are alive.”



"Oh, Lucy!"

"It is true, dear, that Edith speaks of Vidocq being more than ever implicitly confided in; and it is true that none of my friends have been able to trace Annette, or to discover where the Count has gone to since he disappeared from Bonchurch just after we, too late, heard of his engagement as drawing-master with Edith's schoolmistress; but I shall no longer dare to keep your secret should Lockart's health continue to improve. Immediately I shall have to urge Edith to talk to her brother about his wife, and to try and wean him from his prejudices by degrees. My darling, it may be that Angus has long ago thought better of you in his heart; and we must not be too persistent in supposing that his retention of Vidocq is a proof that he still believes the villain's story."

Lady Lockart's pale face flushed and blanched again more than once while her sister spoke, and she pressed her hand to her left side to still the hurried beatings of her heart. She was much too agitated to speak, and Miss Pentonville, putting an arm tenderly round her waist, held her tightly to her breast in a long embrace.

Many minutes passed ere either of them moved again. At length the sufferer became calm, and gazed in her absent fashion up at the sky, while, arm-in-arm, the pair pursued their walk.

"You at least don't believe I ever did anything like what they said?"

"I, my own sister! I never thought so ill of you for a moment. How could you ask me such a question?"

"And you don't think I'm mad now, do you?"

"No more than I am, dear love."

"Then we'll think of it, Lucy."

Lucy Pentonville kissed her sister fondly.

"Give up, once for all, dear," she said, "the idea that you ever were a fit patient for House of Dawn. Misery and desolation of heart may, perhaps, have made you look sufficiently so to mislead the doctors, but your mind was never affected otherwise than by the distraction of grief, and by weakness arising from bodily debility. I am daily more satisfied of that, and long ago I might have known it, had I been permitted to visit you in that dreary house. Between you and Angus there is now nothing to cause apprehension, save his credulity in regard to Vidocq's story. I will not speak harshly of Angus, dear. You may trust me in that. The circumstances you described to me long ago were sufficient to mislead any man, and nothing seemed left to Angus to fight against them with except his love and faith. That these yielded to the force of conviction, is perhaps not to be wondered at, though it is very sad that they should have done so."

"Dear Angus, he would have loved me had he been able."

"You see, Dina, how he still clings to your boy, your son. Do you think he would care for your son so tenderly if he did not still love you? He loves you, sister, and my heart has been swelling day by day to prove it to you from his whole life since he lost you—from what we know of his life from our truthful Edith, and from all that you yourself gathered of his ways through the old gardener, whose daughter watched his treatment of Ebon. We know now that the man, Dr. Wilmotte, whose arrival so alarmed you, was sent in the most affectionate spirit to see how you were."

"I did not think there was anything unkind in his

object; but, oh, Lucy, I felt that, even to be with my boy, I could not, dared not face Angus again whilst he believed me guilty. The fear of drowning in my flight was as nothing to my horror of feeling his mournful, questioning eyes upon me. If I could but reach you, and hide from him till he knew me better! That thought took possession of my mind like a frenzy, when I saw that my supposed insanity did not save me from the risk of being taken home again too soon."

"How you missed being drowned, I never shall imagine, Dina."

"My angel may have kept me afloat, dear. You surely do not think our guardian spirits do nothing for us. I have often felt that while the current carried me on, mine must have kept close to me, whispering in my ear 'be still.' At any rate, I lay still, with my ears under water, and my face turned up to the sky, where there were rosy clouds; for the sun had not been a great while set."

"And thus you might have floated out to sea."

"Yes, but for an eddy I came to, which swept me round and round till the clouds seemed to be all running in a circle the other way. In a little, it washed me on to the coast. I was nearly benumbed by that time; but after a while my struggles brought on a reaction to feverish heat, and I contrived to rise, and scramble up the river's bank into a wood, where I tore my way through the bushes like the wild creature I was. By-and-by I had passed through the wood and come out upon a field, and there the moonshine was bright. At first it scared me back to the shade of the trees, as I fancied it might help the people to catch me, if I were chased. But when I could neither hear nor see any

human being, I took courage, and hastened along the dark side of a hedge. From that hedge I went to another. I had a great deal of sense, Lucy ; I knew how dreadful it would be to run on and on, and at last find myself just where I had started, and I was clever enough to look out always for a hedge quite in the line of the one I was about to leave. Sometimes to get at one at some distance, I was bold enough to cross fields diagonally. Once, when taking a race of that sort, far out in the moonlight, across what I thought was a grass field strewn with big stones, I ran right in among sheep. All the seeming stones jumped up, and, with a loud rush, dashed helter-skelter out of my way. I should think they took me for a ghost ; and I must have been like one, after soaking in the river."

The sorrowful lady's voice grew cheerful as she told her story, and she had the heart to laugh a little, in a low, silvery tone, as she thought of the ludicrous appearance she must have presented that night to the alarmed flock.

"However," she resumed quietly, "I was much more frightened than the sheep were, and the start they gave me brought on such a palpitation that I had to sit down when I reached the corner of the field. There I began to feel chilly again, and that reminded me how wet I was. It is very funny that though my watery dress had clung about me so that I could hardly walk, and much less run, without holding it up, I hadn't had a thought of the dry clothes I carried. I've often told you, Lucy, haven't I, that before slipping from my window I had the forethought to wrap up a change of dress in my waterproof cloak ? Well, in the river I had clung to the bundle,—it, no doubt, helped to keep me afloat,—

and when I was able to get on to my feet, I must, I suppose, unconsciously almost, have kept it in my arms. At any rate, I had it there when I sat down after the fright the sheep gave me, and when I grew cold I remembered it, and determined to change my clothes at once. But, ah, when I got up with that intention, I found that the hedge was so low that it threw no shadow to speak of. The moon was so clear, too, that there seemed no night to hide me, and I really hadn't the courage to begin undressing. However, I saw a group of trees in another field, and, urged by the cold, I rushed away towards them, my gown flapping noisily about my ankles till I held it up again with my disengaged hand. The trees grew on a hillock, and hung over a pond. I saw exactly what to do. I went among the trees, under which I was quite concealed, and put off my wet things as fast as I could. And that wasn't very fast, dear; for my chilly fingers hardly felt the buttons and strings, and I had to tear at some of these until they broke off. But, at length, I was in my dry dress, and began to feel almost warm. I had known from the first that my wet clothes would be much heavier to carry in a bundle than the dry ones had proved, and so I had determined to drown them in the pond. I wrung the water out of some of the under things which I thought I might need again, and then rolled the gown and jacket and petticoats round the biggest stone I could lift. The bundle made a loud thud and splash in the pond. I was terrified, for I thought somebody might be within hearing. Should I ever be happy again, Lucy, I'll ask Angus to take me to find that pond, and we'll fish up the clothes, or what the fishes may leave of them."

"And that will be very soon, my darling. You never related your adventures half so fully and cheerfully before. I quite realize hearing you tell them over again to Angus."

"Ah, that I may be spared to do so! He could not believe what I told him last time I spoke to him; but he will never doubt anything more that I say to him, however strange it may sound, after he learns his mistake then. Poor Angus, how wretched he looked when I was taken away!"

"And what did you do next, dear?"

"I listened. Frogs were croaking near the pond, and some of the sheep I had disturbed were bleating. There were no other noises, though I could see that there were farm buildings a few fields off. I made a bag of my cloak and slung it over my arm. The dry clothes were so comfortable that I became bolder every minute, and, in a little, had courage to walk out from the trees and continue to cross the field in which they stood. It was a very large and undulating field, and when I got to the end of it I stopped to rest a moment, and to think in which direction I should go. In trying to decide this, I felt quite at a loss. In my anxiety to change my dress, I had hurried to the plot of trees without much heeding how it lay with reference to the hedges I had been following, and, in leaving it, I had thought it enough to come out at the side opposite the one I entered by. Then I remembered that I had always had the hedges on my right, and that I had walked on the shady side of them. I must therefore, I argued, have been walking with the moon also on my right. It would of course have somewhat altered its position in the sky by this time, and so to keep in the old direction, leading away from the house, so far as I

could judge, it would now only be necessary to walk boldly on with the moon shining on my right shoulder, and rather from behind. So it was shining now as I stood near the dark side of a low wall. As I remarked that, I thought of my shadow as a means of leading me straight. There it lay, sharp on the pale-brown land. I had only to see that it kept to my left and a little in front of me to be quite sure of going on in the same line nearly, for a certain time at any rate. I felt so satisfied with this little device, that I stood looking at my shadow with a sort of restful complacency. Probably I had done so for nearly a minute, when, without having consciously stirred, I saw it moving—moving and altering in shape. There was something weird-like to my eye in the motion. I had not thought that the course of the moon through the sky would tell so soon upon a shadow. What I saw fascinated me, and when I tried to account for it, I grew bewildered. To lengthen the shadow as it was lengthening, the moon must sink in the sky, and to alter it, not by almost imperceptible degrees, but by decided moves, the moon must be jerking in the heavens, which was contrary to all my experience of its ways hitherto. Presently my shadow, no longer at all to be recognised as mine, for it was broad as well as long, ceased altogether to move. Here was another mystery : the moon assuredly must have stopped in her career. Irresolute, I still stood perfectly quiet, and wondered with all my might how such things could be. If the heavenly bodies were getting out of order then the world was no doubt coming to an end, and, in that case, I might as well kneel down and wait, praying for Angus and my boy till the trumpet sounded. To run on would be useless. However, the continued

stillness around me, and the continued brightness of the light, put that notion out of my head : the world was in no danger. What, then, had caused those phenomena, and what, in particular, made my shadow seem that of a bulky object, when I, by glancing down, could satisfy myself that I was a slight figure? A vivid thought, darting into my mind with a flash, seemed to resolve the whole matter in an instant : I was really mad! That was the key to every puzzle. Things appeared to me as they were not. In fact, my shadow was probably not bulky, most likely it had never moved either slowly or quickly. My heart sank very much when I thought of this. My mind must be much more seriously affected than I had ever been led to suppose it, even when I was most undisguisedly spoken to as a lunatic by the servants at the House. So bad it must be, that I clearly could not trust myself to walk on in a straight line any longer. I should infallibly walk in a bend, and so return to the very door of the House, to be pounced upon at once. My knees now trembled under me as despair began to possess my heart. But while my knees wavered, my eyes sought the shadow again, and I felt persuaded that it looked restless to a degree not to be accounted for by diseased vision, or assuming that I saw correctly, by the shaking of my legs. Most distinctly it moved. Towards one side, especially, it extended itself. Presently it split! Slowly split up into two separate shadows! But that is more than even a mad person can believe! thought I, and I laughed hysterically at the idea of the deceiving imps in my brain expecting me to think that I really saw anything so impossible. Scarcely had I laughed, Lucy, when, oh the horror! I heard, and even seemed to feel,

a sudden movement behind me. My back grew in a moment as chill as death, and dreadful shivers ran through my flesh from my scalp all the way down to my legs. I could not stir. That something would overwhelm me like a pall, or that hands would close upon my shoulders seemed certain if I remained where I was. Yet move I could not; nor look round; nor even shriek. I was terror-bound, and in an agony such as I had never dreamed of. Thus I suffered for probably only a few seconds in reality, though the time seemed far longer, and then the noise was renewed in a deliberate way, and this time accompanied by a second sound, which was familiar to my ear. The latter gave me sudden courage, and my face broke out in a profuse perspiration, such a revulsion to bliss from the depths of despair I experienced. Confidently I looked round, and saw, gazing over the wall at me, with an interrogative and rather perplexed eye, a beautiful white horse!"

"Ha, ha, ha, my poor darling, that was a surprise!"

Lucy Pentonville had listened with intense interest to her sister, into whose adventure she entered with such simplicity, that she had found no leisure to anticipate its conclusion.

"Dearest pet! what a horrible fright you had got! Ah me, I've quite a stitch in my side from laughing just when you had fairly terrified all the breath out of me. What an imagination you have! No wonder little things so often make you nervous."

Dina, with an eye throughout to the "beautiful white horse," had told her story with a great deal of zest, and she looked quite gay when its success was proved by her sister's surprise.

"What a pretty shell!"

Stooping, she picked up a large "buckie," which even in the pale moonshine seemed of a bright colour.

"Oh, I shall keep it for Ebon. Poor darling, he must be sound asleep in Glasgow now. I wonder, Lucy, why he had to leave Beechworth in the morning when the first stage was to be only to Glasgow."

"Edith does not explain in her letter why he would have to do that."

"Perhaps Robina had begged leave to see her friends in passing through."

"Very likely, dear. Shall we go in now? It is nearly eleven o'clock, and you've had more than enough night air."

The ladies had reached a little jetty which crossed the sands and ran a short way into the sea. Near it, but high and dry on the beach, lay a small pleasure-boat, neatly rigged, and seemingly ready to be launched at a moment's notice. A path between sandbanks went inland from the narrow pier. Into it the ladies turned. In a hundred yards or so, it took them through the midst of a tract of gorsy waste to a wicket in a low white wall. Passing through a little gateway, they stepped upon a gravel walk leading across a smooth lawn of considerable extent. Great masses of light and shade rising mysteriously into the air were trees of a size and uprightness scarcely to have been looked for so near the sea. Black patches of irregular shapes lying about on the lawn, were their shadows, and, beyond the lawn, a small two-storey house, which stood glittering in the moonlight at the far end of the gravel walk, was the dwelling in which for two years Lucy Pentonville had comforted her unfortunate sister.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Lucy, dear, aren't you awake yet?"

Dina was already up and dressed. The ladies of Oden cottage were early risers, and in summer generally broke their fast with a preliminary cup of coffee about seven o'clock.

"Lucy, dear," Dina repeated, seeing that her sister did not move.

"To be sure we had a very long walk last night," she added to herself, "so I mustn't be hard upon her."

All unconscious of her sister's voice and generous forbearance, Miss Pentonville still slumbered on. Dina looked lovingly at the handsome and wholesome-like face, and her thoughts flew back over the past two years, and hovered with fond remembrance at moments when that face had seemed to contain all the comfort that was left in the world for her. Presently she dropped a light kiss on the placid brow, and then moved away softly.

The chamber was of good size, and had two windows to the front. On each side of it stood a French bed. From their beds the sisters could see each other, and in sickness or sadness, or when hurricanes raged outside, often had their trustful glances crossed the floor. A door near Dina's bed opened into a dressing-room, at

the further side of which another door led to an apartment which occupied the south-west corner of the house.

On quitting her sister, Dina went into the dressing-room and stood before a looking-glass. She had evidently dressed herself with care, and nothing seemed wanting to make her attire complete except the fastening of some hooks between her shoulders. Her gown was of silk of a soft texture, and its colour was a silver grey, like that of those alpaca cloaks we saw on the beach. Plain white bands closed round her small wrists, and a plain collar was fastened at her throat by an opal button. A silk apron, with pockets, completed her exceedingly simple dress. Her sunny brown hair was smoothly brushed over each ear, and plaited up closely at the back of her head. She had "done" it all with her own hands. Usually her sister did it for her, she in turn plaiting Lucy's flaxen locks.

Lucy's maid had fortunately left her "place" before Dina's arrival at the cottage, and an excuse had been found for turning back a new maid whose coming home had been unexpectedly retarded. Since then the ladies had waited upon each other in their dressing-room and bedroom, and had kept only house and out-of-doors servants, whom it was unnecessary to take into their confidence. This plan had hitherto worked well, none of the servants ever suspecting that Dina was other than the Mrs. Penton she chose to be called.

The beautiful lady looked earnestly at her image in the glass. Presently she noticed a line made by the knitting of her brows when she faced the light, and she carefully rubbed it away, promising to herself thenceforth to guard against the practice of knitting her brows. "It gives one a cross look," was her comment. Long

sorrow had imparted a certain gravity to her mouth. She feared it had a sad expression, and she smiled at herself to see the effect of that. The smile proved less gay than wistful; but she thought it might do. A child, even though her own, would not, she fancied, detect its sadness. Then she began to consider her eyes. They had for the last two years been very mournful eyes to one who, loving her, understood them; but ever since the arrangement of Ebon Lockart's visit, that loving one had thankfully seen their expression brightening.

Dina's frame this morning was pervaded by a sort of gleeful twitter. Her heart had learned a new song, and kept it up unremittingly, lightly trilling sweet melody along sympathetic chords, even to the lady's finger tips. Of course her eyes readily took up the air. A good reader of eyes might have guessed that the song they sang was one which they had not practised much, yet they certainly sang it sweetly. Thinking of Ebon, Dina smiled again, this time without design, and, lo, her whole countenance in the glass was as radiant as it was lovely! She turned away perfectly satisfied. That was not a face to scare any child. Little Ebon would love her. Yet a while, she must not be known to him as his mother; but as a stranger she would win his heart. Even his aunt, though known to him as such, should not be more dear to him than her kind-faced companion, who would tenderly woo him and wile him to her bosom by her gentle arts.

The lady's step was light when she turned from the mirror. Miss Pentonville, lying, with her eyes now awake, in the bed opposite the open dressing-room door, rejoiced too, for she had seen Dina's triumph in her

face. Lucy knew perfectly what thoughts occupied Dina's mind as she critically examined herself; and often ere this she had delighted in anticipating the readiness with which Ebon would be drawn to the sweet face which was so dear to herself.

With mingled apprehension and bliss, Dina had believed at first that it would be impossible for Ebon to see her without recognising her, as, at any rate, one who had been familiar to his baby eyes; and not without much talk had Lucy convinced her that a child just over five was not in the least likely to remember even his mother after a separation of above three years. Dina having given in to this view, it was now only to her gentleness, her love, and her beauty that she trusted in her passionate desire to make the little fellow cling to her.

"Come and let me fasten your dress, my pretty lady," said Lucy from her bed, as she threw up her fine plump arms.

Dina started and blushed, and then, flying to the bed, buried her cheeks in the pillow beside her sister's face. An arm curved, and its hand softly caressed the back of her neck. In a little, one of the buried cheeks turned up, and the pretty lady's lips kissed Lucy's eyelids, so that Lucy's blue eyes could not let out their merry light.

A brush happened to lie astray on a chair within reach. Dina hastily took it up, and having drawn her handkerchief over the pillow under her sister's head, she brushed out front locks of long Scandinavian hair.

"You should have been a Norse king's bride," she said, looking into sea-blue eyes.

Lucy smiled; little cared she to be a Norse king's

bride, or a bride at all. She was one of those blessed souls who invariably find themselves on the sunny side of life, however many saddening shades may appear to others to surround them. Even when the sorrows of others came in view, they did not wound her so much as they awoke in her heart an active compassion. Constitutional cheerfulness had made her a happy spinster so far, and she looked to the future without apprehension.

But with her noble features and great blue eyes, she would certainly have graced any sea-king's poop; and it is improbable that the ocean winds ever hushed themselves obediently before the imperial sweep of any arms lithier or whiter than hers.

"Now, you know I haven't washed yet," was presently her prosaic remark.

Dina tossed the brush on to the chair and picked up her handkerchief, softly laughing. She then turned and stood while Lucy fastened her dress. That done, she tripped off to the other room with a more elastic step than her ankles had yielded for many a day. She went straight to the south-west corner room and entered it.

This, too, was a bedroom. A moderate-sized bed was fixed against the east end, and a small, tastefully designed iron one stood with its head to the north wall. The latter was to be Ebon's bed. His mother's first idea had been to order a cradle, but Lucy, with a tearful smile, had overruled that at once, and so their Glasgow tradesman got a liberal order to send the most elegant bed he had suitable for a child of Ebon's age. Ebon was said to like pretty things, and so it had seemed desirable to make the coverlet pretty. Dina

had spent a fortnight of quiet forenoons in embroidering it with leaves, flowers, and birds, and knowing-looking mice. One of the last, which the child would see when sitting up, had just run off with a straw stolen from a linnet's nest, of which the owner was fluttering forward in angry pursuit. Work of this sort had served to while away the long months which intervened between the promise of Ebon's visit and the joyful news that it was to come off on an early day.

Lady Lockart, passing for dead, of course had not a penny of her own ; but her sister's fortune was ample, and her hand liberal. Nothing, therefore, that money could procure for Master Ebon's comfort or convenience was lacking in Oden Cottage, and the bedroom, which he was to share with his nurse Robina, was complete in all its appointments.

Having satisfied herself that the little bed was in perfect order, Dina placed herself near the head of it, and considered the effect from that point of a number of water-colour drawings on the opposite wall. These were the fruits of Dina's own pencil. Some of them were drawings made from memory of spots on the Continent, where the artist had spent happy days with her husband ; others were recent views of points of interest in the Oden neighbourhood, but those which were placed so as to be the best seen from the bed were lively representations of birds and small animals,—very dramatic, and all of them naturally coloured.

Content with her picture gallery, the lady now moved to the window. She threw up the sash and began to draw forward and rearrange the branches of some plants. One of these was the honeysuckle, which she had so successfully depicted in that view of the

cottage sent to Sir Angus by Miss Pentonville. She bent some of the sprays and tied them in such a manner as to let their blossoms be well seen from the room. Their perfume was sweet. She enjoyed it in a sort of anticipatory way, as if, through sympathy, partaking in Ebon's delight in it rather than feeling the present gratification of her olfactory sense.

Not yet did she know how another wooer of her young lad's love had, in tender rivalry, ordered a honey-suckle for his window at Beechworth!

While thus employed, a gay voice summoned Dina back to the dressing-room, where Lucy needed hooking up and assistance in her back-hair plaiting.

A few minutes later the sisters descended arm-in-arm to the parlour, a little room with a window in its south-east corner. The early sun was shining cheerfully in, and an aroma of coffee pervaded the air. A house-maid had poured boiling water into a coffee machine the moment she heard the opening of the dressing-room door, and it had already nearly run through.

"Mrs. Penton wishes to try the new pony this morning, Elsa. Tell Malcom to have it brought round with a side-saddle in half an hour," said Miss Pentonville.

This referred to a white pony which had been bought for Ebon's use. His prudent mother had determined once more to test its docility by riding it herself.

"I wonder if the new pony is as white as the 'beautiful white horse' which so disturbed your shadow that awful night?" said Lucy, when the servant had retired.

Dina sat in the sunshine, and seemed to find amusement in letting her clear milkless coffee drop from her spoon through the sun's rays.

"Do you know, Lucy," she said, as if her sister's re-

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mark had been unheard, "I wonder why I don't give up taking cream to coffee. I'm always tempted to half finish the cupful before, as a matter of conscience, I put in the cream. It is so much prettier, especially in bright mornings, when left clear; and I think it makes one feel brisker when taken so."

"The cream is strengthening, but you might take it before or after the coffee instead of in it."

"Thank you; I believe I shall in future."

"Tell me now, Di, what the white horse did when you looked round?"

"What a chattering humour I must have been in last night, Lucy, when I told you such a lot of things that I hadn't thought of speaking about before! Wasn't it silly to confess to such foolish fancies even to you, love?"

"Not at all, Di; I never was better entertained in my life,—knowing as I did beforehand that the story would not turn out really tragical."

"But my thoughts about the shadow's motions—wouldn't they have made any less partial hearer think that I must have been crazy, that night at least?"

"I don't think so, dear. I can quite imagine having such fancies myself in similar circumstances, when, for instance, half-dazed by fatigue."

"I could not think so ill of you," cried the beautiful lady, smiling archly. "I don't think you need ever apprehend being driven distracted by bare fancies."

"Why, my dear, do you suppose that I have no imagination?" asked Lucy, raising her handsome face.

"Not an unhealthy one like mine."

"Toots, Di; you never rest until you have made yourself out to be worse than you are, in some respect or another. Tell me what you said to the white horse?"

"It trotted away as soon as it had satisfied itself that I was a creature of this world like itself. I felt quite lightened for a while, and got bravely over a wall into the next field. This chanced to have some hay-ricks in it, and, by-and-by, I felt so sleepy that I made a hole in one of them and sank into it wrapped in my cloak, forgetful altogether that people might be still out trying to track me. I was asleep in a moment, and when I awoke it was broad daylight, though the sun had not got more than a few degrees above the horizon. I felt as brisk as a bee; and remembered every incident of the night as vividly as possible. I tried to guess where I was, but could only be sure that I had got too much north towards the Sidlaw hills, and that to reach Perth I should have to strike across the fields straight west. West would, for the present, be nearly opposite the sun, so I thought I should do pretty well till I got to a road and met some one to direct me. When I had settled that, I took a survey of myself. There was a ditch near, and I contrived to get a peep of my head in it. I had on a little round hat, tied fast by a ribbon under the chin. Having taken it off I thought it enough to wash my face with my handkerchief dipped in the ditch, and I had nothing better than that to smooth my hair with. On the whole I wasn't amiss.

"It was now I began to consider what I was to call myself should my name be asked. Mrs. Penton suggested itself. I seemed to have a right to half my maiden name, and so I thought it would not be a very big fib to call myself Penton without the 'ville.' That settled, I set about searching my pockets, and this made me look blank, I assure you. I hadn't a farthing, I presently remembered. Indeed, they hadn't given me

any money in the House. No one was allowed to sell to the patients, so it didn't matter there; but to be without money now, when I could hope to reach you only by coaching right across the Highlands, that was unpleasant."

The fair speaker paused, as if to admire more at leisure the amber drops she still let fall through the sunshine.

"However, I need not dwell on that," she continued, "for you know how I got plenty of money."

She drank off her coffee and put aside the cup.

"Little thought Angus how it would serve me when he put it on my finger one day just after our marriage," she added slowly, as she turned a ring set with one brilliant of great value.

The diamond glittered in the sun.

"It sparkled in that way," she went on, "when I was twisting my fingers in despair. I saw it and immediately laughed like a child, kissing it, and blessing Angus who had thus unwittingly provided the means for my escape."

"Were you so ready to part with his gift, Dina?" asked Lucy, doubtingly.

"Part with it? I never thought of that. I would only borrow on it. And did I hesitate a moment when my darling sister enabled me to redeem it and have it sent home from Perth, oh, generous Lucy?"

She threw her arms round her sister's neck and kissed her gratefully.

"I hear the pony's feet on the gravel," said Lucy, affectionately returning the embrace.

"Then I must put off my crinoline. Will you untie it, dear?"

Lucy performed an operation at Dina's waist, and immediately something was heard to slip down. Dina stepped aside, and half-a-dozen or more concentric rings joined together by a white net were seen on the floor. The owner of this curious article picked it up by the middle, and immediately the net became a bell. It had made a bell of the lady. Without it she looked very much like a bottle, and, at the same time, her skirts sufficiently resembled those of a riding-habit to enable her to mount a pony in such a secluded place as the garden of Oden Cottage.

"It is wonderful how well the steel holds out through rough usage," she remarked, meditatively examining the rings one after another. The netting was worn off at some places, and showed that the rings were ribbons or belts of fine steel, very pliable and springy, and indeed much like watch-springs on a large scale.

"It's as well, however, not to be rash with it," said Lucy. "One of Mrs. Donald's rings snapped when she sat down and it hurt her."

"But she's fourteen stone, Lucy."

Lucy laughed, and taking the article under review from her sister, she hung it on a bracket. At the same moment the maid reappeared and announced the pony. The ladies put on straw hats in the hall, and then went out to the front garden. Malcom, the groom, was there.

"A cheery morn, mem and miss. The pony's as douce a wee beastie as ever I set een on, an' ye needna fear but the young gentleman'll find him sae."

Malcom having been intrusted with the purchase of the animal, was, perhaps, not an impartial judge of it. At any rate, Mrs. Penton had determined to put it again through its paces herself. She leapt lightly into the

saddle, and Lucy put her skirts in order. The pony was small for her, but she was light, and the little beast began capering in a playful way, as if quite unconscious of being burdened. He trotted down the centre walk, and cocked his ears at the little gate. Dina encouraged him and he cleared it easily. He was now on the common, and an inspiring sea breeze blew aside his forelock. He sniffed the briny air with evident delight, and indulged in some manœuvres intended to display his willingness to gallop. The lady encouraged him again, and immediately he was at full speed on the sandy knolls, where the whin bushes would have made sad work with the rider's skirts had she worn a habit. Dina gave him his head freely. Nothing seemed more to his mind than to go as fast as he could, and he flew over the bent almost in a straight line, taking every bush of unusual size at a flying leap. The lady, who enjoyed his pace intensely, let him go till she felt that he was beginning to flag. She then checked him, and wheeled him round. He obeyed her hand readily, and returned at a walk, until Dina, thinking him sufficiently refreshed, put him into a trot on the hardest part of the waste. His trot seemed easy, and she gave him a hint to display his canter, which, strange to say, proved nearly as good. She patted his white neck, and smiled on Malcom when she reached the gate, whence he and Miss Pentonville had watched her ride.


"He is very docile," she said. "I wonder, though, if he likes the sea?"

She turned his head towards the little pier, and trotted down the seaward lane. Her sister and the old groom followed as far as a hillock of sand a little beyond the gate. They saw her ride briskly down to the beach.

The tide was coming in before a breeze, and the waves rushed up the sands, following each other in such quick order that each, on retiring, was caught up by its successor and urged back upon its first track. The lady left the pony quite to his own will, and he walked straight to the sea, considered it with his ears advanced, snorted, and then backed to avoid a wave. In a little he went forward of his own accord again, and let the waves run among his feet, putting down his nose to them as they flowed clear round his hoofs. Dina now tucked up her dress as much as was practicable, and, taking command of the pony's head, trotted him into the water till it was a foot deep, then she wheeled him to the right, and made him scamper along the shore among the waves. He was quite gay, and jumped about and pawed the water whenever he got a hint that that would be acceptable. Dina, much pleased, and as if to reward him with a warming run, presently guided him on to the dry beach, and shook his bridle. Off he went on the smooth, tide-flattened sand. One might have thought he had run away, but Dina knew his character now, and let him go with confidence, though her hat ribbons warned her of his pace by almost cutting her ears, so sharply did they touch her as they streamed in the current of air. This time she did not allow him to go straight on till he wearied, but at a moderate distance she turned him and galloped back at the same tearing pace, till she approached the pier. Thence she trotted up the cottage path and rejoined her sister.

"We are greatly obliged to you, Malcom: both his temper and his paces are capital," she said.

Malcom doffed his cap to express his satisfaction, and then with a look of modest triumph led off the



pony to the stable. He was a sensible old chap, and never spoilt a compliment by grinning too widely at it.


Dina's beauty was dazzling when she took Lucy's arm, and the sisters slowly moved along the shelly sand of the garden walk. Her hair was a little loosened by the breeze, and strayed about her neck in bright amber waifs. It looked far richer now than it had looked in the pale moonshine. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, and her cheeks shone with unwonted warmth. Nothing could be finer in its way than her face when in her sad hours, it was colourless and grave; but thus in animation, its beauty carried you by storm: features, colour, and expression combining to bewilder you by their exquisite loveliness.

"How happy our darling will be when he finds such a pony provided for him! Oh, I shall teach him how much he has to thank his Aunt Lucy for; and I'll never feel jealous, Lucy, never!"

Lucy looked with sisterly pride at the happy enthusiast beside her; but she contented herself by saying, "I think, dear, we should go in to breakfast now."

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. GRANGE had risen nearly as early as the ladies of Oden Cottage, and while they were employed in the manner I have described, he was occupied in a survey of his farm. Towards nine o'clock he found himself at home again. The breakfast party had not yet assembled, and he was fain to loiter about the south lawn walks to while away the minutes. The atmosphere had been thoroughly purified by the storm which proved itself so mischievous at Beechworth, and from a sky partially strewn with flaky clouds the sun shone unobscured. A gravel walk surrounded the south lawn, which was about the size of a large bowling-green. Beyond it was a paddock, at present full of hay-ricks. It was from the latter that the light-hearted lunch party had obtained the means of burying the gallant little artillery officer. Having looked round to satisfy himself that there was no one waiting for him in the dining-room, Mr. Grange presently stepped over the paddock-fence, and taking up a fork proceeded in a workmanlike manner to turn the hay. It was pleasant to see him do so. He had hung his white hat on a post, and his glossy, bald and massive head glittered in the sunshine, which at this hour was genially warm without being dangerously hot. His smoothly shaven



and blooming cheeks looked as fresh and ruddy as well-sunned apples. His handsome features were animated, and his spectacles blinked and dazzled as he moved his head in the light. He wore a suit of grey tweeds, and his jovial person was set off to advantage by their light colour. He had taken off a pair of brown leather gaiters which he made it a point to wear when out on the farm, and without which he never felt himself a match for his intelligent steward, and at every step he took among the hay his shoes lost some of the mud they had gathered in the fields. He was still a strong man, and the fork looked very light in his hands as he picked up heaps of hay and scattered them thinly over the grass.

"Good fun, isn't it, uncle?" said a voice behind him, before he had worked long enough to get overheated.

"Ha, Sunbeam, are you there? I thought no one had arrived," he exclaimed, tossing his fork away as he turned and saw Mary Melville leaning coolly on the fence.

"Bracy and Mr. Drycale are somewhere. I left them to shift for themselves while I popped out here to fetch you. We heard all about Captain Calvert's adventure from Janet your maid, who was down at the Dingle last evening. What a stunning fellow he is, uncle! Don't you think he's a brick?"

Mr. Grange chuckled the young lady under the chin, and his eyes smiled upon her through his spectacles. Then he politely offered her his arm and marched her off towards the house.

"It was with the utmost difficulty I kept Bracy at home last night," Mary resumed. "She wanted me to drive her up in the dark to see the hero as soon as Janet had told her story—which had marvels enough

for even my appetite. And this morning she was dressed by eight, and declared a hundred times that the ten minutes' drive would take an hour owing to the rain last night. However, I knew better than to bring her here three-quarters of an hour before everybody else, and I cooled her down by the assurance that Captain Calvert would very likely breakfast in his own room after such an accident. I hope he won't, though. There she comes."

Miss Lushet, in a morning-dress of speckled muslin, and a light bonnet of her favourite towering-front shape, now emerged from one of the long dining-room windows, and, followed by Mr. Drycale, who was almost lost to view behind her noble figure, advanced with her usual queenly step to greet Mr. Grange.

"Dear Mr. Grange," she said in her rich tones, "how fresh and bright you are looking this morning!"

Mr. Grange, more accustomed to pay than to receive compliments, bowed profoundly, and quite forgot a little speech with which he had been on the point of welcoming her.

"We have spent a night of great anxiety," she went on immediately, "and we are told that Dr. Wilmotte is already with Captain Calvert."

"Is he? Well, he promised, I remember, to come over early to see how his young friend might be this morning; so his being here is no proof that the lad is worse than he was last night."

"And how was he last night, Mr. Grange? Did his mind seem quite to have survived the shock?"

"Shock? oh, the shake or thump. His head seemed all right again when we last saw him. Who is that behind you, Miss Lushet?"

The Squire's blue eyes twinkled, and he stood still to observe Miss Lushet's greeting of Calvert, who, leaning on a stick and limping a little, was coming out accompanied by Dr. Wilmotte.

"Oh, Archer! I am indeed thankful to see you safe and well again," exclaimed the lofty lady in her most fervent manner.

She took his hand in both of hers and pressed it warmly, looking the while down upon his bright face with a fond, and yet, in some degree, reproachful gaze.

"Rash, rash, foolish fellow!" she added, apostrophizing Archer in her blandest tones.

"You've even more pluck than I used to believe, Archy, dear," said Mary Melville with feeling, as she took Calvert's hand the moment Miss Lushet resigned it. "I only wish I'd seen the whole affair, and had had a chance of cheering you.—But you're lame?"

"Oh, not to speak of. I found my ankle stiff when I got up."

"Your ankle!" exclaimed Miss Lushet. "Ah, what if the old wound should have broken out again! Can you reassure us, Dr. Wilmotte?"

"Oh, certainly, Miss Lushet," said the polite Doctor, bowing to his questioner. "His ankle no doubt got a strain yesterday, though it was not felt at the time. There is no other injury save a bruise on the head."

"Yet I am sure you will advise rest, Dr. Wilmotte. Let me have the pleasure of assisting you, Captain Calvert."

Without waiting for his answer, the lady slipped Calvert's hand over her arm, and, gently constraining him, led him through the nearest window to a couch just within it.

More to oblige her than to relieve his leg, Archer laid himself out on the sofa, and having got into a comfortable position, he chuckled at his luck in being thus made of by a lady of so much grace and beauty.

Beautiful she was at all times, but at present her appearance was even more attractive than usual, so much had the morning air freshened her rather sultry style, and so much was her massive figure lightened by the airiness of her dress, and the pretty trimness of her summer bonnet—in which there was only a single damask rose to remind one that the wearer was a brunette of the deepest dye. Such, in fact, was the effect of the light dress and straw bonnet upon her complexion that one might almost have forgotten that nutty-olive which so often made Miss Lushet look like an eastern when among her fair-skinned friends.

This look of freshness seemed to Archer in keeping with the morning air and the morning sunshine. It suited his humour, too, exactly, and he experienced an undeniable sense of gratification when the lady patted his shoulder-cushion, moved the couch till his eyes escaped the glare of the great window beside it, and then, drawing a round table to his elbow, declared that he should have his breakfast quietly with her. He felt deliciously lazy, and unfeignedly admitted to himself the pleasantness of being saved all sorts of bother by one whose help was lavished with so much enchanting tenderness. On such terms he was, he thought, willing to play invalid as long as his kind friend might seem to wish it. Her proceedings tickled his sense of humour too, and his eyes twinkled gaily up at the lady's, while his smile seemed to say, "'Tis a very jolly joke, oh, gentle dame!"

"And have you no headache to-day?" inquired the "gentle dame," touching his forehead with the tips of her fingers, as if to indicate where he might be expected to feel a headache.

She bent over him in a fond-like manner as she spoke, and he, quite softened by her anxiety, replied,—

"No, dear, none whatever."

The words were hardly uttered when greetings at the other side of the room reached his ear, and his eyes met those of Edith Lockart, who seemed to have paused suddenly on her way to the sofa, as if astonished by the attitude of the group before her.

Hot blood tingled in Archer's ears, and forgetful of his sprain, and forgetful of Miss Lushet, he sprang up briskly and crossed the room in a moment to greet the fair visitor. That he did so awkwardly is undeniable, but not surprising, for he felt himself blushing to the roots of his scanty hair, and there was a horrible dread in his mind that Miss Lockart might have overheard the wholly inadvertent 'dear' with which he had just replied to Miss Lushet's kind inquiry.

Miss Lockart also blushed, so much unwonted fervour there was in Archer's address.

"My brother," she said, relieving herself by saying the first words that came into her head.

Sir Angus, who had entered with her, put his right-hand stick beside the left one and shook Archer's somewhat hesitating hand very warmly.

"I hope to become much better acquainted with you, Captain Calvert," he said in a perfectly cordial voice.

Archer bowed and murmured something about his gratification. The baronet's friendliness was so unexpected that it increased the confusion into which Edith's

sudden appearance had thrown him, and, in a bewildered sort of way, he attributed it to some admission on Edith's part of the regard for him which he would fain believe she cherished.

But he had not time to speculate about that; for, barely allowing him to greet Miss Edith and return the pressure of Lockart's hand, Miss Lushet, in a gentle but authoritative manner, laid three fingers upon his shoulder, and shaking her head with an air of affectionate remonstrance, indicated that he must return to his suddenly forsaken couch.

"Captain Calvert has sprained his wounded ankle, dear," she said in explanation to Miss Lockart, not without a touch of pathos in her tone, "and Dr. Wilmotte thinks he should lie out on the sofa."

"I am so sorry that he rose, and that I did not know in time to prevent him," said Edith sincerely.

"Pray, return to the sofa. I hope it does not pain you much," she added with a glance of commiseration at the injured limb.

But though she spoke sincerely there was more than commiseration expressed in her voice. There was a faint ring of sarcasm in it, as if she were wondering on what pretence Miss Lushet presumed to be so very ready with her advice and assistance.

"Thank you, a thousand times, Miss Lushet," said Archer bravely, "but the sprain is a mere trifle, and I can hop about quite comfortably."

His indolence and willingness to be petted by the kind lady had quite ceased, now that Edith Lockart was present. But Bracy was not easily repulsed. Her fingers closed softly but firmly upon his shoulder, and with a smile of mingled pity and fondness, she said, in her blindest voice,—

"Oh, Archer, Archer, it is sad to think what such reckless indifference to your health may lead to one day, should you be without some thoughtful companion to care for you."

Calvert winced, and felt himself undone. "What the devil does she mean by calling me Archer?" he growled in his heart, as he allowed himself to be moved off limping, and leaning on Miss Lushet, to his former position on the couch. He felt that it would be ridiculous to "fight the matter out" with a lady whose bland decision of manner was really quite overwhelming, and so he yielded to her with such grace as he could muster, but with a decided resolution, at the same time, to see himself out of the scrape as soon as possible.

There was a flash of impotent indignation in his eye as he threw his limbs along the sofa, and crossed his arms behind his head, but immediately he felt impelled to look up, and when he did so, the large brown eyes of his volunteer nurse were bent upon him with so much tenderness that his anger vanished in spite of him, and he sighed, "Thank you, Miss Lushet," with the feeling that such loving devotion from so charming a woman was but poorly paid by thanks.

Edith did not follow him to the couch. She stood still, with her usual air of graceful serenity, and with one hand resting on the back of a chair. No one would have thought her moved, but Marian Grange, who had come to her side, felt her tremble with suppressed excitement.

Marian perfectly understood her feelings, and, with sisterly kindness, helped her to conceal them. The breakfast was laid out on several tables of moderate size, distributed, with suitable seats, about the spacious

room. Marian led her friend to the nearest, and asked what she would have—tea, chocolate, or coffee, all of which were ready.

Edith, not aware that she had betrayed her agitation even to Marian, gladly seated herself, and chose her beverage. She could see Calvert's couch from where she sat by just turning a very little to the left. Presently Dr. Wilmotte and Miss Melville took the chairs opposite her.

Mary and the Doctor had stood together covertly observing the little play we have described. Little Mary enjoyed it immensely, being quite up to every move, and she had been able to restrain the expression of her amusement only by leaning very hard on the Doctor's arm. But there was no malice in her eyes when she took her seat and bade Edith good-morning. Edith, who liked her and felt at ease with Dr. Wilmotte, was very glad when her table was thus occupied. The Doctor had counted on seeing the fourth place taken by Miss Grange, but was disappointed, Marian choosing to sit at her father's table, near which Sir Angus was now comfortably established in his own wheeled chair, with his rheumatic feet laid out on a stool near the fire. The Squire sat at the other side of the chimney-piece, protected from the fire by a banner screen. Mrs. Beagle, who had been in the room from the first, and had greeted the guests on their arrival, sat at the same table, with her niece on her right, and Mr. Drycale on her left—the Squire and Lockart being opposite. Miss Lushet had taken a chair at Calvert's table, which was the smallest. There was a fourth table, and the Squire, observing that it was unoccupied, glanced round the room inquiringly.

"Where's Polly?" he said.

Before any one could answer, the door opened, and Miss Polly appeared, ushering in Mr. Eagle, for whom she had probably lain in wait outside. Mr. Eagle bowed, and, shaking hands only with Mrs. Beagle, made his way under Polly's guidance to the vacant table. Polly then hastily kissed her cousin and Miss Lockart, and shook hands with Bracy and Archer. To the other gentlemen she only bowed, thinking, evidently, that she had not time to do more.

"What will you take, Mr. Eagle?" she asked, still standing, as if she thought he might happen to want something not on his own table.

Mr. Eagle wished nothing but what was already within his reach, and Polly established herself at once on the chair opposite his, rejoicing in the prospect of a delightful *tête-à-tête*.

Mr. Grange believed that thus broken up into groups his guests enjoyed more freedom than when seated together at one large table, and his breakfast parties, when large enough, were invariably thus arranged. There were no attendants, and every one was expected to help himself and his neighbours, a plan which allowed of freedom of speech from the first, and contributed not a little to that good fellowship without which any kind of party is stiff and intolerable.

"So your boy is fairly off, Sir Angus," the Squire remarked, as he handed Lockart a plate of cold chicken and tongue.

"Yesterday morning. Already he will have left Glasgow, and he ought to reach Oden this evening. My sister-in-law seems determined to win his heart. She has bought a pony for him, as appears from her

last letter to Edith. She and her lady companion are great equestrians, I hear, and I suppose they will be taking my lad out to race on the sands. Fortunately he is a capital rider, and can stick on the back of anything. Poor boy, I shall be right glad to see his pale face again."

"It would do you an immense deal of good, Lockart, to go over to Oden yourself. Splendid wild scenery, and pure sea-breezes. You'd be another man in a fortnight."

"No doubt he would," said Dr. Wilmotte.

"Ah, well, perhaps so; and certainly I do feel less unable for such a journey than I did a few days ago. Even since last night I walk better."

There was something sarcastic in the tone of the last words, which was not lost on his hearers.

"What were you about last night, then?" asked Wilmotte.

"We were treated to a little excitement at Beechworth, which rather stirred up my expiring energies, I confess. It was very pleasant to me at least."

"Did you really enjoy being burned out of bed, Angus?" asked Edith, her attention diverted by her brother's voice from the table at which Calvert and Miss Lushet were partaking of breakfast in silence.

"Burned out of bed!" exclaimed the Squire; "why, how was that?"

"Hadn't you a thunderstorm here?" asked Lockart.

"We were touched by the skirts of one, which, by the bye, seemed to be violent at Beechworth."

"Yes, we had the strength of it, probably. The girls got a fright, the lightning smashing part of the old tower while they were in the Lantern."

"Bless me, Marian ! you have said nothing of that. But neither of you were hurt ?" cried the Squire, startled.

"We got only a fright, papa ; but the flash did a great deal of mischief in the room, and it darted down stairs and set Sir Angus's bed on fire."

"You don't say so ?"

"The thing happened thus," said Lockart quietly as he balanced his chocolate spoon across his fingers : "I had been in bed for a few minutes. Usually I sleep almost as soon as I lay my head on the pillow—a fact which may surprise you if you remember my nervousness ; but last night the thunder made such a din in the rickety old mansion that I was fain to keep awake. My eyes were closed, however, and I no doubt seemed to be asleep. Presently a whiff of smoke crossed my nose, and I looked up. I was in the midst of flames. Fortunately they were chiefly about the front and foot of the bed, and I was able to scramble out at the back unsinged. The thunder was crashing through the house, and I had no doubt that the lightning had entered the room. I limped across the floor to ring the bell, but half-way I nearly fell over my worthy lad Vidocq, who lay on the carpet in an agony of terror. The lightning had terrified him out of his wits apparently, and he was quite helpless. On looking round I observed that the bed-clothes and curtains were on fire at several separate places, and I was considering that phenomenon when the girls made their appearance at the door and the house got into an uproar. The upshot of the affair was that the fire was extinguished, and my trusty Vidocq revived from a state of partial suffocation by a good drenching at the water-tap in the passage. Poor lad,

he has again and again this morning expressed his mortification at having been unable to render me any assistance in the emergency. He has, he says, a constitutional dread of lightning, which renders his limbs powerless. When the flash broke into my room, and he, occupied in laying out my clothes for the morning, saw my bed suddenly in flames, he became, he says, utterly paralysed, and voiceless even. Of course I could not be hard on one suffering under such an infirmity, and, indeed, his spontaneous tears, which would have filled a phial, were enough to save him from severity of any kind."

Lockart appeared in excellent spirits, and there was something in his tone which made it evident that he enjoyed his story; so much, indeed, was this the case that Mr. Grange almost involuntarily exclaimed—

"You speak as if the whole adventure had been a capital joke."

"Ha, ha," replied Sir Angus gaily, and yet with a touch of bitterness in his voice, "I certainly enjoyed it prodigiously. Yes; the flames threw a light on certain dark points, and illustrated Vidocq's affection for me personally."

Mr. Grange felt his curiosity piqued by this hint, but was too polite to inquire further—Lockart would no doubt explain if he had a mind to do so. Dr. Wilmotte, too, wondered what it meant, and his thoughts instinctively reverted to what he had heard of Vidocq's former doings from old Hugh while in the widow Doherty's cottage. Angus had, however, it appeared, no intention of explaining his meaning, and with a suppressed chuckle he continued his breakfast in a business-like way, which seemed to show that he had disposed of

the fire and Vidocq for the present. His face was less pale, and his bearing altogether less languid than usual.

The breakfast went on quietly, and several excellent appetites developed themselves as the varied and delicately cooked cold meats were tasted. When at length the demand for the more substantial viands seemed to have ceased, Mr. Grange rang the bell and ordered them away. Two maids speedily cleared off all the meat plates and dishes, and nothing was left on the table but the lighter bread stuffs, with saucers of golden butter and honeycomb, and refilled pots of tea, coffee, and chocolate.

"Ah, now we are free thoroughly to enjoy ourselves," said Lockart, who reckoned eating among the unavoidable evils of this life, and always felt thankful when he had got it over.

The Squire, without partaking Lockart's distaste for substantial food, sympathized with him in so far as his pleasure in beverages was concerned. The quiet and leisurely imbibing of coffee after a good meal was a thing which gratified his palate and soothed his stomach. Without, then, viewing the consumption of the cold meats as a labour which it was a blessing to have got over, he, too, was prepared thoroughly to enjoy the lighter recreation now before him.

Lockart had allowed Mrs. Beagle to refill his cup with creamy chocolate, and, leaning back with his ear resting on one hand, he stirred and sugared the delicious mixture. Grange watched the circuits made by the spoon with a complacent smile, and then, while in the act of replenishing his coffee-cup, said, almost with tenderness,—

"You're becoming quite a good fellow, Lockart. It

warms one's heart towards you to see the improvement in your appetite. Last time you were here you seemed unable to swallow anything more nourishing than creamless tea ; now you appear to gloat upon that rich mess even after conscientiously getting over a chicken wing and a round of tongue. One of these days I expect you will ask a second helping of roast mutton, and then, indeed, I shall take you to my bosom as a brother."

"Thank you, Grange, I do believe my human sympathies extend with the increase of my appetite. This morning, for example, I enjoy instead of feeling bored by a circle of happy friends."

"That's a comfort to us at any rate," said Mary Melville under her breath, as she slipped three lumps of sugar into Wilmotte's cup while his gaze was fixed on Miss Grange.

"Why don't you boldly pay her marked attentions and then go in for her like a sensible man?" she whispered when at length the Doctor turned to her.

Wilmotte coloured a little at finding his thoughts read, and he hid his confusion in his tea-cup, which, however, he felt compelled to set down immediately, so much was the beverage over sweetened.

"Rather sweet, isn't it?" asked Mary coolly. "I thought you'd find it so when you came to taste it."

The Doctor's cheeks reddened still more, for he had no doubt that in an absent fit, with his eyes on Miss Grange, he had himself over-sugared his tea—Mary, no doubt, watching him with her humorous green eyes.

"Dear Ellis," she said in his ear, "I did it, just to rouse you. Never say die. Remember that I'm ready to back you whenever you determine to set to in earnest."

She laid her pretty hand on his arm as she spoke,

and shook her lavish curls at him till he smiled and patted her hand with two of his strong manly fingers.

"We'll hold our own yet, Ellis; never fear," she went on in the same tone. "But you must look alive, or we may find ourselves a day behind the fair. Sir Angus stares pretty often at our beloved."

Wilmotte, at once annoyed and grateful, glanced at Lockart, and saw that while he sipped his chocolate his dark eyes were fixed with a half-admiring and half-inquiring gaze upon Marian Grange, who, however, appeared unconscious that she formed a subject of observation to any one. The Doctor felt a cold tremour in his breast, and recalled Lockart's conversation of the preceding forenoon, when the baronet had spoken with perhaps only affected sarcasm of his sister's project of wedding him to Miss Grange. It required a strong effort to suppress the anxiety excited by remembrance of remarks which, in spite of their tone, had disturbed him at the time, and by the unmistakable interest with which his patient now gazed at the sweet object of his own homage, but he made that effort, and presently looked as calm as any one in the room.

Edith scarcely at all overheard, and did not at all understand what Mary said to Wilmotte. Whatever her brother said in his conversation with the Squire, she had an ear for, but still more ready was she to listen to any words which reached her from Captain Calvert's corner. Maidenly self-respect deterred her from looking very often towards that corner, but now and then a pardonable curiosity constrained her to catch it in a passing glance. And what her passing glance caught was always a variation of one condition of affairs. Bracy Lushet was pressing some dainty upon Archer, or

she was disembarassing him of a superfluous plate, or she was poking his cushion into comfortable softness, or she was speaking low, melodious words to him, as if in affectionate admonition ; and while she did these things Archer was either looking at her with an expression of mingled admiration and bewilderment, or stealing glances at Edith herself. One or two such glances Edith inadvertently met, and when she turned away her face there was always a heightened colour in her cheeks, and for the following five minutes she would speculate on the meaning of Archer's glance, wondering timidly if it expressed shame at being seen by her in undisguised intimacy with the real object of his affections, or dismay at the probable effect upon her own consideration for him which must result from her observation of the terms on which he appeared to be with Miss Lushet. Edith would fain have taken the latter view of his feelings, but that diffidence inseparable from even the first buddings of love, whether in the male or the female heart, taught her that Calvert most likely had all along preferred his present companion. She was a simple-hearted girl, Miss Edith, and since Archer's gratifying gallantry in gathering for her a bouquet of wild flowers while he was yet perched in a highly dangerous position, she had, we know, fondly yielded to certain tender feelings, and even admitted them to another. Not, then, without a sense of mortification could she observe the familiar affectionateness with which a beautiful woman monopolized the man by whom her heart had been touched, and, naturally, not without an effort did she maintain that outward composure to which her friends were accustomed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"PAPA," exclaimed Polly Grange, pretty loud, and much to Edith's relief, "Mr. Eagle is impatient to hear what you and Sir Angus have to say of fair Enid. He wants to know if history tells that she was really beautiful?"

"Beautiful, my dear? Well, as I am not one of those who believe that

'Beauty stands
In th' admiration only of weak minds
Led captive,'

as Milton's Satan says in reply to Belial, I am glad to assure you that Enid was lovely. Indeed, as a rule,

'The soul that goodness like to hers adorns
Holdeth it not concealed;
But, from her first espousal to the frame,
Shows it, till death, revealed.
Obedient, sweet, and full of seemly shame,
She, in the primal age,
The person decks with beauty; moulding it
Fitly through every part.'

So at least says Dante, and Spenser has a similar fancy:

'Every spirit, as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the fairer body doth procure
To habit.' "

"That's nonsense, you know, papa. You're joking,

aren't you? Some of the nicest people we visit aren't in the least pretty," said Miss Polly frankly.

"Perhaps, dear; but do not they improve from year to year? If a heavenly spirit happens to get into an unpleasing home, it not the less shines through the countenance, and in the course of time the features, receiving an abiding impression, actually to some extent acquire nicer forms. The mind moulds the body, as Charles Kingsley says in one of his breezy essays, and 'the inward beauty seldom fails to express itself in the outward,' just as inward ugliness seldom fails to mark itself on the outer man; the spirit of sloth, selfishness, or brutality branding the person so that we may know at a glance what manner of man we see. As for Enid, all the romancers are agreed about her personal beauty. Villemarqué, on the authority of the old French poet, Christian de Troyes, says that she was 'la plus belle créature' ever seen in the world, and it is certain that she was reckoned one of the three most lovely dames of King Arthur's court. The Welsh legend, which Tennyson seems to have followed in his *Idyll*, says plainly that Arthur's courtiers deemed that 'had her array when she came among them been suitable to her beauty, never had they seen a maiden fairer than she.'"

"And she, the real Enid, was also actually a nice girl, such as Mr. Tennyson makes her, was she, papa?" persisted the younger Miss Grange—not that she cared, but because she fancied Mr. Eagle interested in the poem.

"Yes, Polly; Tennyson cannot claim the merit of having invented her goodness any more than the beauty he endows her with. In the Welsh story her obedience to her father, her serviceableness, her patience, when

called on to resign a fine dress, her unselfish regret when her husband sacrifices the applause of his warriors to be with her, the devoted affection which makes her brave his wrath rather than allow him to be taken unawares by robber bands through her mistimed obedience, all are brought before us vividly."

"Ha," said Sir Angus, rousing himself, "don't you give us rather too favourable an impression of the 'Mabinogi,' Mr. Grange? I was greatly obliged to you for the loan of it, and I read it with attention. I confess Enid seemed to me little more than a name in it, whereas in the *Idyll* her individuality is distinct from the first. We almost know her even before she is described, from the words of her song,—

'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up nor down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.'

Reminding us, by the way, of the Florentine's,—

'Pur che mia coscienza non mi garra,
. . . giri Fortuna la sua rota
Come le piace.'

When in the Welsh legend Geraint—of whom, by the bye, your friend Christian de Troyes speaks favourably, saying that he was a person of much amiability,—

'Moult fut plains de grand bonté.'—

When, I say, Geraint proposes, in the legend, to tilt for Enid, 'Gladly will I permit thee,' says at once the old Earl, and we have none of that sweet scene in which, in the poem, Enid receives the message from her mother with pretty modesty, and stands

'Rapt in the fear and in the wonder of it.'

Then Enid's anxiety, as described by Tennyson, not to

discredit Prince Geraint by her shabby dress, and her simple fancies thereanent are purely original; while the scene where the mother dresses Enid in her recovered splendour is represented in the Welsh only by the earl's answer,—‘They are in yonder chamber arraying themselves.’ ‘Let not the damsel array herself,’ said Geraint, ‘except it be in her vest and her veil, until she come to the court of Arthur, to be clad by Gwenhwyvar (the Queen) in such garments as she may choose. So the maiden did not array herself.’ That is all. There is nothing about her thoughts on the matter. Thus the fond speeches of the mother which bring out Enid's character, and the exquisite

‘For Enid all abashed she knew not why,
Dared not to glance at her good mother's face,’

(when Geraint's order to take off the fine dress reached them) are Tennyson's exclusively. Equally so is Geraint's speech to the mother with the glimpses of Enid in it, and, also, the idea of making Enid keep her old dress for years,—

‘But Enid ever kept the faded silk,
Remembering how first he came on her
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,
And all her foolish fears about the dress;’

for there is no hint in the Welsh that it was this suit she afterwards wore in the journey or ‘quest’ with her jealous lord. Up to the date of her departure for the court with Geraint, Enid of the Mabinogi seems to me, I confess, just a mere good-natured nonentity. When she reaches court, her beauty is extolled, and her modest manners are indicated by at most the kindness she meets with, and by the Queen's proposal to bestow on her the head of the white stag, with the explanation, ‘I

do not believe that any will begrudge it her, for between her and every one here there exists nothing but love and friendship.'"

"A sufficient proof of her being a nonentity," remarked crusty Mr. Drycale, interrupting the baronet.

"Not unless the Queen's 'every one' means merely all the women," said Grange slyly.

"Which, however," he added immediately, "it does not, for—to imitate my friend's mode of treating the subject—it is said, 'the maiden took up her abode in the palace, and she had many companions, both men and women, and there was no maiden more esteemed than she in the Island of Britain.' This popularity, and the grieving of everybody on her leaving court three years later, surely indicate a finely-blended modesty and intelligence equal to those of your poet's heroine, Sir Angus. Her doings and words are much the same during the 'quest' in the legend and in the *Idyll*, only as Geraint has to encounter parties of four, three, and five knights in succession in the former, instead of three and three merely, her devotedness in warning him, in spite of his order to be silent, is brought out most strongly in the legend. On disobeying Geraint when the robbers appear, she cries, 'The vengeance of heaven be upon me if I would not rather receive my death from his hand than from any other; and though he should slay me for it, yet will I speak to him.' Her interview with the dissipated young Earl in the corner of the inn chamber is more detailed than in the *Idyll*, except in respect to the Earl's speech. Before being frightened into deceit, Enid boldly expresses herself thus,—'Yonder man (that is, Geraint) was the first to whom my faith was ever plighted, and shall I prove inconstant to him?'

When at length she finds a trick necessary to enable her to get rid of the Earl, what delightful subtlety there is in declining to go off with him at once in this way,—‘Behold, then, chieftain,’ she said, ‘this it is most expedient for thee to do to save me from any needless imputations. Come here to-morrow and take me away, as though I knew nothing thereof.’ How natural that the Earl should be deceived by this affected dread of imputations. Tennyson has been content to copy this :

‘Earl, if you love me as in former years,
And do not practise on me, come with morn,
And snatch me from him as by violence.’

Again, in the legend it is said that she did not confess at once to her husband this pretended appointment with the Earl, ‘lest it should cause him uneasiness and care,’ a trait of feeling equal to any in the *Idyll*. The subsequent incidents in the Inn are copied closely by Tennyson ; and he had not to invent the death of the Earl and the dispersion of his followers by Geraint, nor yet the scene in the banquet-hall, and the fate of the savage Doorm from Geraint’s unexpected stroke—that ‘fiercely-wounding, severely venomous and sternly-smiting blow upon the crown of the head,’ which clove the Earl in twain, ‘until the sword was stayed by the table.’”

“But what does it matter, papa, dear,” said Marian, “who invented the story?”

“Well, not much,” replied her father, “but there is such a hypercritical spirit abroad in these days that no poet is allowed to call his fame his own until his obligations to earlier writers have been traced and sifted.”

“Tennyson’s obligations in these *Idylls*, are at any

rate not so great, we know, as Shakspeare's in many of his plays," said Sir Angus, raising his cup. "Nor are they anything like equal to Chaucer's in his story of Griselda in the *Clerk's Tale* (which, by the bye, has points of resemblance to *Enid*)."

"Ah, for simplicity and pathos finely seasoned with humour and sarcasm, commend me to old Dan's *Griselda*," cried Mr. Grange, striking the table emphatically.

"Agreed," said Lockart; "but when you insist upon abating from Tennyson's *Idylls* the borrowed bits, you must let me assign to Boccaccio, or *his* authority, nearly all but the form of Chaucer's tale."

"Oh, dear me! I don't envy any one, either *Enid* or *Griselda*," yawned Mary Melville; "they are equally spiritless. Just fancy a woman being content to put off 'a suit of bright apparel' instantly at her husband's bidding! I'd at least have run down to let him see how well I looked in the 'gorgeous gown' before I resigned it."

"Ha, ha," laughed the jolly Squire, as he rose from his chair. "One can fancy the different turn each story must have taken had my lively Sunbeam played the heroine! And, by the bye, Mary, I know to whom it is unnecessary to say,—

'Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old.'

Surely Geraint would have suited you since, when in a good humour at least, he held it no less necessary to give his wife pretty dresses, than

'To compass her with sweet observances.' "

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Ah, take care; you might have hurt it!" exclaimed Calvert, sitting up suddenly on his sofa.

Miss Lushet had attempted to crush a troublesome bee with her saucer. The bee was buzzing now on the window close to the sofa. With his handkerchief, Archer deftly caught it, and then, leaning forward, let it fly off uninjured through the open casement.

Miss Lushet was not a cruel girl. The difference between her plan of disposing of the bee and Archer's was one arising from difference of sex merely.

Archer had continued to recline on his couch with a commendable patience, which exceedingly gratified his fair protector, and the result justified her advice. Eased by rest, his ankle recovered from the effects of the slight strain which had proved troublesome in the morning, when the joint was somewhat suddenly brought into play as he jumped out of bed. He felt now that he could get up with a fair prospect of regaining his independence, and he laid his plans accordingly.

He had paid little attention to the conversation at the principal table. The consideration of his own predicament had afforded food enough for his thoughts, and whilst the Squire and Sir Angus talked about Enid,

and to a certain extent engaged even Miss Lushet's attention, he considered his resources with a view to an energetic campaign against the overpowering lady at his side.

Calvert was neither very egotistical nor very conceited. He must have been a miracle of humility had Miss Bracy's tenderness and kindness been lavished upon him for months without impressing him with the conviction that, moved by his trials, or attracted by his reputation as a soldier, or urged by the instincts of an affectionate nature, she had formed for him an attachment which it would be painful to have broken by any sudden blow. Archer was no such miracle, and having a thorough disrelish—desperate swordsman as he was in the heat of battle—for the infliction of pain in any form, only such a means of breaking off from Miss Lushet as would allow of his regulating his efforts with due regard to her feelings could commend itself to his judgment and his heart. Such a means he now supposed himself to have discovered, in the very simple device of testing the nature of the lady's regard for him, by openly paying such attentions to Miss Lockart in her presence as must at least suggest to her mind the possibility of his desertion. Various considerations recommended this plan to his mind, and it had, in particular, the advantage of being the most agreeable to himself. Whatever might come of it, he should at least have enjoyed the pleasure of Edith's society, and have learned not only the strength of Miss Lushet's tenderness for himself, but also the footing on which Edith stood with Ralph Eagle, whom, for no obvious reason, he still looked upon as his rival.

It was just as every one had finished breakfast and

Mr. Grange rose that Archer captured and let off the bee which Bracy had unsuccessfully attacked. There was immediately a general movement from the tables, and Archer, taking advantage of it, was quickly at Miss Lockart's side.

"Your foot is better then?" remarked Edith, seeing that he walked freely.

"Oh yes, thank you, the rest has put it all right again."

He looked round as he spoke, and, lo, Miss Lushet was close to him!

"Indeed, the joint is quite flexible and painless," he hastened to add, as if afraid that the tall lady had followed him as before to reclaim her patient.

"And," he went on with more spirit and courage, "I attribute the cure entirely to your kind forethought, Miss Lushet, in advising me to lie on the sofa."

The lady received this concession very graciously, although Archer addressed her from Miss Lockart's side, and unmistakably as if she herself were only casually present, and not the person with whom he was in conversation.

"You have so much generous self-forgetfulness," she said, "that, for your good, one must sometimes constrain you!"

She smiled playfully as she said this, and even Archer might have thought she was jesting, had he not noticed as she spoke a momentary meeting of her level eyebrows, which seemed to his excited imagination to bespeak a consciousness on the lady's part of her own power to constrain or release him at her pleasure. The moment was one when, as it appeared to him, the slightest weakness would be fatal; this calm assump-

tion of at once the right and the power to control him must be resisted without delay.

"Ha, ha," he cried, "and such kindly fetters as those by which Miss Lushet constrained me to lie there any man might covet. It is worth while to be restive when one has the chance of being so agreeably restrained."

"That's pretty strong," he thought. His feeling was that the payer of a compliment always holds the place of patron. But it was not easy to tickle the bland lady's vanity or to abash her by politeness.

"How beautifully you express yourself, Captain Calvert! courtesy and courage blend so happily that it always gratifies me to see them together."

She spoke gravely in rich tones, which rolled in mellow fulness over those of other voices, as a great bell predominates when struck among the jangle of little bells. Calvert felt as one of the little bells might be supposed to feel; but the gracious dame did not abuse her advantage. With her usual self-possession she merely touched Archer's shoulders gently with her glove as she finished her speech, and then bowing to Miss Lockart passed on to where the Squire stood talking to Sir Angus.

"By Jove, she's a stunner, indeed!" ejaculated the outwitted artilleryman in his heart, as he saw the stately and graceful figure of his tormentor calmly move away. "How can any fellow expect to come it over her? The idea of being at pains to *ménager* her feelings is a very rich joke. Why, she has fifty times the command of them that I have of my own. On my life, I believe she is now paying compliments to Sir Angus himself! Ah, but one can see that he at least is quite a match for her."

"She is very fascinating and beautiful," said Edith Lockart, speaking of Miss Lushet, and half, as it were, to herself.

Calvert turned to the fair girl, and felt a sudden impulse to make what he would have called a clean breast of it to her, in confessing without reservation the whole story of his apparent entanglement with Miss Bracy Lushet. The impulse was strong, so strong that in a moment it carried all before it, and candid Archer, without forethought, was in rapid sentences recounting all the circumstances to his wondering companion, while, with tacit concert, he and she moved off together through one of the open windows and sauntered across the lawn. From his first dance with Miss Lushet, to his last pang in perceiving the tenderness of her air as she cautioned him about jerking his leg while lying on the couch, every incident and every feeling occasioned by the friendliness of the bland lady was confessed with a frankness and fulness that left nothing to be desired. Miss Lockart listened at first with mingled apprehension and wonder, and then with wonder only; for Calvert had presence of mind enough to suppress every allusion to herself which he felt tempted to indulge in in the course of his narrative.

On the whole his confession produced a favourable effect. Miss Lockart had seen enough of Bracy's warmth of manner to see that Calvert's apprehensions were such as a man in his position might not unnaturally feel, while, on the other hand, she did not know enough of the lady to feel able to guess what probability there was of their being well-founded. She innocently expressed her sympathy with him, regretted the annoyance to which he had been sub-

jected, and admitted that she shared his dread of being further distressed.

His thorough good feeling, his genuine anxiety to be kind even to the extent of sacrificing himself at the shrine of duty!—these were the features in Calvert's conduct which struck Edith most deeply, and the thought of which entered with most harmony among those fancies in which her mind had been of late indulging. His weak irresolution in neglecting to make sure at the earliest moment that Bracy could fall into no mistake regarding his feelings, was scarcely thought of, or if his candour forced it upon her attention, it was immediately explained, and almost justified by the plea of his amiable dread of wounding the lady's feelings. His amiability! Ah, what could be more manifest than that? Every mistake was clearly attributable to it! How well-placed had been her own confidence in it! How happy that woman who might hope to see the most of it!

“And if it should turn out that she is really attached to me?” said Calvert ruefully.

Edith looked at the grass, and her cheek was pale—a symptom not lost upon her watchful friend.

Would Miss Lockart kindly assist him in observing Miss Lushet so as to make sure of her feelings, he asked timidly. If so, it was due to Miss Lushet that they should proceed with caution, and, to avoid confusion, act always in concert!

Edith expressed her willingness to be of any service to Captain Calvert, and laughed gaily at the idea of the proposed league, while plucking leaves off a sweet-scented laurel, and rubbing them between her fingers to let forth the perfume. She was to be a disinterested

friend, of course. Indeed, the remotest suggestion of any other character would necessarily have prevented the compact, and made her take fright in confusion; a fact perfectly patent to Archer, and one which made him not a little cautious how he ventured upon the least reference to his cherished hopes.

As we have said, Archer had decided that the most harmless way of bringing matters to a crisis with Bracy was for him to pay attentions to Miss Lockart.

"Would it not be well to try the effect of exciting Miss Lushet's jealousy?" he now demanded of his ally.

Edith thought the idea a bright one, so it only remained to determine to whom attentions should be paid in Bracy's presence. To Marian Grange or Mary Melville, she suggested.

"Or to yourself, Miss Lockart," urged Calvert earnestly. "Indeed, if you will be so generously good-natured as to permit such a thing, it may be better in every way that Miss Bracy should be made jealous of you. It would hardly do, perhaps, to explain the real object of marked attentions to Miss Grange or Miss Melville, or right to pay them, without explanation."

"Indeed it would not be right to run the risk of deluding either of those sweet girls by mock attentions!"

Edith perceived all the good feeling which was evinced by his consciousness of that, and, on the other hand, the difficulty of explaining his real motives to them was obvious. Yes, he might make use of her! She was but too happy to assist in any way in extricating him from the very embarrassing and painful scrape into which his amiability had led him. Thus it was settled that at every convenient opportunity Archer was so to

address Edith as to suggest to Bracy's mind that he was flirting with her.

"It is a pardonable deceit," saith Edith sophistically.


"Oh, most innocent!" said Archer, well knowing how little deceit there would be in the matter, on his side at least!

Such a good device was not one lightly to be postponed. Certainly not; Bracy was looking even now towards them, as if wondering what they were talking about.

So they must begin at once. They did so, that is, Archer began to pay the proposed attentions, and Edith, as per agreement, received his pretty speeches and gifts of flowers, borrowed from the Squire's parterres, with a finely acted, or real, mixture of embarrassment and pleasure well calculated to plunge daggers into the breast of an actual rival.

But who had ever seen Miss Lushet excited? She was now walking on the upper part of the lawn with Mr. Eagle and Polly: the latter looking sadly outshone by her. She seemed to be speaking of Calvert and Edith, indicating them with a slight wave of her hand, while Edith was in the very act of accepting a rose from her companion. There was a smile on her lips, and in her eyes the old look of satisfied affection. Archer noticing this expression, thought it looked very much as if in perfect confidence she had voluntarily allowed him to leave her for a little, and even to flirt with Edith for a variety. That at her slightest beck he would return gladly to her side, he could not see the vestige of a doubt in those soft brown orbs.

"Look," he said to Edith, and then he explained his impression to her, as indeed their compact required.



"She certainly doesn't look jealous," said Edith, musingly, and perhaps not without a slight twinge of mortification.

"No, she relies on me so perfectly," said Archer, in accents of despair. "How shall I ever undeceive her? The blinder she is now the worse it will be for her when her eyes are opened at last."

Edith in regard to this also sympathized with her good-hearted friend. And they were quite at one as to the necessity for still stronger measures. They would at once mark Archer's independence very decidedly, by taking a good long ramble together right away through the shrubbery. That would be a decisive step, they argued.

Such a ramble they began accordingly, Bracy meanwhile with apparent contentment continuing to loiter on the lawn with Mr. Eagle and Polly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"HAVE you seen little Espie this morning, Miss Grange?" asked Dr. Wilmotte, taking his first opportunity of addressing Marian.

"Not yet," she replied, "I arrived with the Lockarts from Beechworth just in time for breakfast."

"I think of going to her now, and afterwards to Ivy Cot to dress Mrs. Doherty's arm. Perhaps you will—?"

"Accompany you? with pleasure; and Mary Melville, I am sure, will go too."

"Not I indeed," said Mary Melville, gaily. "I've other fish to fry. Mr. Eagle, for instance; though, to be sure, he is rather fowl than fish!"

"Nonsense, dear, you'll see enough of him when we return, and also at your Dingle party to-morrow."

"Then you really want me?" said Mary.

"Yes, dear, I wish you'd come."

Mary yielded. Her first thought had been that it would not do for her to spoil Wilmotte's chance of a *tête-à-tête* with the little girl she was convinced he loved, and loved with a humility too which quite softened her towards him.

"I suppose we needn't ask Edith to join us," she re-

marked after agreeing to go, and glancing as she spoke towards Miss Lockart, who was just then in the act of moving off to the lawn with Archer.

"No," said Marian, smiling; "it would be cruel to disappoint Captain Calvert, who yesterday, we must remember, earned a good right to our indulgence for some time to come."

"That he did," said Mary warmly; "I only wish, for my part, that it depended upon me to treat him with indulgence. I should be thankful to have the spoiling of the dear fellow."

"When you can spare me a minute, Dr. Wilmotte, I shall be glad to have a word with you on the gravel," said Lockart from the other side of the room.

"I am quite at your disposal, Sir Angus," replied the doctor, remembering that his patient was entitled to his first attention.

"I'll join you at the Gowans' cottage," he continued, turning to the girls.

"Very well," said Marian; "and, pray, don't hurry Sir Angus. We like to have a gossip with Kate."

Wilmotte bowed with his usual ceremoniousness and then crossed the floor to where Lockart was standing beside the Squire. A servant was at the moment carrying the invalid's wheel-chair over the low window-sill at the west end of the room. Lockart took the Doctor's arm and followed the chair, while Mr. Grange retired to his library close at hand. The walks were well rolled and level, and with a hand on each wheel Angus could propel his chair.

"You have arranged to walk with the young ladies," he observed when the chair was fairly in motion.

"Merely to two of the neighbouring cottages. I can

easily overtake them, and Miss Grange desired me not to hurry you."

"Did she? very thoughtful. A sweet girl. I had a pleasant chat with her in our parlour at Beechworth last evening, and she treated us to some exquisite music. Clever, isn't she? Cool too; especially in emergencies. She helped my men to water last night during the little fire we had with a quiet promptitude that quite struck me. Then think of her daring in making Edith sit with her in the Lantern to watch the lightning just before it smashed the roof of the tower. Bold, eh?"

"Or stupid, considering the exposed situation," said Wilmotte in slightly jarring tones, for he did not greatly relish hearing Sir Angus praise Miss Grange.

Lockart glanced at him, but made no comment upon his ungracious remark.

"Well," added the doctor after a pause in the conversation, "how do you feel now?"

"Oh, all right, thank you. 'Twas to talk of another matter that I asked you to indulge me. I want to consult you about the hunting up of a girl who was maid to my unfortunate wife. Her name was Annette I-don't-know-what; and I have no idea in whose service she is. Through Vidocq, I might, perhaps, find her; but I should prefer to see her without his knowledge. I have a vague impression that Edith's late housemaid, Martha, was said to know some friend of Annette's, and she was a relative of your patient Mrs. Doherty. Annette was, you must know, for I see my way to taking you into my confidence at last in regard to certain painful affairs, with which, indeed, you have already had to do, in so far as you were sent to House of Dawn—"

"Pardon me," the Doctor interrupted, "I was waiting only for an opportunity of telling you something about Lady Lockart and the girl Annette."

"Bless me, Wilmotte, when could an opportunity fail you for such a purpose?"

"It was only yesterday, after I saw you, Sir Angus, that I heard what I have felt that it may be my duty to repeat."

"Out with it, man!" cried Angus, his hands trembling.

But Lockart was never intentionally rude.

"Nay, dear Wilmotte," he added, "you will forgive my hastiness. Speak, I pray you."

"It is a subject which must be very painful to you, Sir Angus. Allow me to say, that I was unaware that any impropriety of conduct had been imputed to your wife. I heard the imputation and its disproof at the same moment."

"Its disproof?" cried Lockart, springing erect in his chair.

They were now in the west garden, and out of hearing of their friends.

"Disproof," repeated Wilmotte quietly.

He then gave a rapid summary of what old Hugh had communicated to him in the widow's cottage the day before;—Annette's sick-bed statement to her cousin, Martha's friend, about Vidocq's wish to marry her, and his diabolical mode of punishing her for her refusal by getting up a story about her mistress's unfaithfulness, and her own treachery to her master in abetting it.

"Ah, I see, I see; clearer every hour; clearer, clearer. Thank heaven!" murmured Lockart.

"How wonderful, wonderful!" he resumed presently.

"From every side evidence has poured in upon me, and all within a few brief hours. The week before last this story of Annette's would have been laughed at; to-day, though it is evidently somewhat incorrect, it confirms my knowledge of the truth. I now can trace nearly every step in that desperate villain's treachery."

"Vidocq's?"

"Ay, your voice may well express surprise, for you have known my perfect reliance upon that man's fidelity, and, I may say, affection. But your story is evidence enough of what he is, so the hard words need not startle you."

"Pardon me, Lockart; I formed no opinion on hearing the old man's tale. One knows not what tricks his memory played with it. You must hear the other side."

"I have heard the other side. O prudent Doctor!" said Angus, with bitter emphasis. "Seeing that his story about Lady Lockart would soon have to be traced to its author, Vidocq yesterday fell upon the expedient of attributing it altogether to Annette—asserting even that she had already confessed her guilt to some acquaintance of his. She had, forsooth, set her cap at him, and then, in the bitterness of revenge, contrived the story of her mistress's misconduct to punish him, his attachment to Lady Lockart being such that her humiliation was the bitterest pill his spiteful sweetheart could make him swallow in her mortification! A likely story, and, curiously enough, just the converse of the maid's, as reported by old Hugh. Of course it took a scale off my eyes, and I began to see somewhat through the rogue."

Lockart chuckled, and Wilmotte could scarce restrain a shudder. There was something in the chuckle which

seemed more than the expression of complacent mirth. The mirth was, as it were, intensified by a tone expressive of fierce anticipation of retribution falling at last upon the too long trusted valet. Lockart's smile was sardonic, too ; and the good Doctor began to feel anxious. It was hard to say what a man subject to whirlwinds of passion might not do in a case like this. The miserable valet might prove the means, though this time involuntarily, of getting his master into a more wretched state than ever. What if Sir Angus were to shoot him in his fury—that fury which was evidently accumulating in his breast—to break out, doubtless, when the full measure of the man's villany had been at length laid bare ?

“Yes,” resumed Sir Angus, after enjoying his sense of triumph for a minute or two, “I see pretty well through him at last. It is incredible that Annette should have invented a tale as much to her own discredit as her lady's, and ruinous to herself, merely to vex her fellow-servant ; on the other hand, it is equally difficult to believe that merely to have Annette disgraced and dismissed, Vidocq should have contrived to make it appear that she had abetted her lady in an act of unfaithfulness. The maid may in fact have slighted Vidocq, and he may have been glad to punish her, but to revenge himself on his mistress, and above all, to secure his own position, were, I believe, his primary motives. How deeply Lady Lockart had offended him I had little idea at the time, because I did not then know, as I may say I now do, that he had overheard her advising me to part with him. She, poor girl, had from the first regarded Vidocq with suspicion, and his attempts to propitiate her by extreme servility of de-

meanour rather confirmed her dislike. Vidocq professed unbounded attachment to her, and I, like a fool, did not doubt his sincerity. At length my wife almost besought me to dismiss him, and I, moved by her anxiety, was debating the point with myself—for Vidocq had been long in my service—when he, the subject of my thoughts, made his appearance with a very rueful countenance, and in tears, commenced a statement to the effect that Annette in a moment of extreme confidence had confessed to him that on a certain occasion at Dresden, she had contrived an interview between her mistress and a Count, who shall be nameless now. He declared that at first he had totally disbelieved the story, but that circumstances had accidentally confirmed some parts of it, and led him to make inquiries which had resulted in the clear conviction of his lady. He was utterly broken-hearted by the discovery; yet nothing, he conceived, could excuse him in keeping it to himself. Much as he had always been devoted to Lady Lockart, to his duty to myself, every consideration must give way, and so on. The result being, that my faith was for the moment shaken, and that I consented to look further into the matter. I did so, and was fatally blinded by the agreement of certain incidents with Vidocq's, or, as he called it, Annette's story. Some things which seemed to tell against my wife are now cleared up, and I can guess how others misled me. Vidocq had so cleverly blended truth and fiction in his narrative, that even now I do not wonder at its effect upon my judgment—all I wonder at is that my heart yielded to my reason instead of upholding my faith. But you who knew not my wife can hardly understand this. Ah me!"

Angus paused, and sighed deeply.

"Could I," he exclaimed in a little, "have but seen her, knowing the truth, for a single instant before she died! Have but exchanged a word with her—have shown her my contrition—have won her pardon! Heaven willed it otherwise, and I fear we cannot cry across the river: from the other side, at least, no sounds reach unto us."

Again he paused, weariness in his eye.

The Doctor, not unmoved, stood silent at his side, willing to say something soothing, but unable to hit on the proper words.

"I know what you would say, Wilmotte," Sir Angus resumed presently. "You would fain remind me that it is a blessing to know that she went forth into the unknown unstained; and that to know even now that she never wronged me is more happiness than I deserve. I am sure it is. I am indeed happier than I had imagined it possible to be again, though, alas, hell at the same time burns within me!"

Somewhat thus he had spoken to Edith on the garden terrace,—amazing her. Wilmotte understood him better.

"Well, well, a truce to such thoughts," he went on. "It is not in a moment that I have been able thus to trace Vidocq's steps through all that occurred. Half of this past night I have spent in mentally tracking them, and only this morning have I made them out to my satisfaction. That my wife's innocence would be confirmed from every quarter, Vidocq appeared to take for granted yesterday afternoon, and his only anxiety was to make me believe that, true or false, the story about her had not originated with him. Improbable as his accusation of the maid Annette looked, I could not at

once be perfectly sure of its falseness. The girl might have had some secret hatred of her lady which prompted her to sacrifice her own prospects for the sake of ruining her. She might actually have devised the tale, and Vidocq might have been deceived by her, and really for a time have believed in Lady Lockart's guilt. But to put it mildly, strong suspicion against Vidocq was aroused in my mind, and I resolved to keep my eye narrowly upon the fellow until more light, such as that I now have, should be thrown upon the matter."

"I have for some time suspected him of keeping his eye pretty narrowly upon you, Sir Angus," said the Doctor quietly.

"You were right, Wilmotte, in doing so. You hint particularly, I daresay, at the little accident to Vidocq's ear, consequent upon your opening my study door somewhat sharply. He has since explained that, and awkwardly enough. But we had another instance of his curiosity. Edith detected him playing spy through the parlour window. She feels confident that he watched us for an hour or so; and now I know his object. I have thought it out. He was jealous of Miss Grange! I had suspected as much. Yes, he was apprehensive that another Lady Lockart might arise to plead for his dismissal, and so he stood out in the rain to mark my behaviour to the sweet girl,—which, I may say, was perhaps calculated to confirm his fears!"

Dr. Wilmotte listened now with almost painful attention.

Sir Angus again indulged in a chuckle, but this time it was free from bitterness—a fact which probably, however, embittered it to the Doctor.

"I can imagine, too," Angus resumed, "that another

circumstance annoyed my faithful valet. For the first time, I had walked from the dining-room to the evening parlour. Evidently I was growing independent. If I got fairly set on my legs again, and if I married, why, his services might become hardly so indispensable as they had been. Thus I suspect the fellow of reasoning; and such thoughts, added to his apprehensions regarding the discovery of Lady Lockart's innocence, were sufficient, I feel convinced, to lead him to perpetrate what I believe he did perpetrate in the course of the evening. You wonder what I allude to. Well, I'll be frank with you. The truth is, I am satisfied that Vidocq, and not the lightning, set fire to my bed. I don't think he was such an ungrateful brute, or such a fool, as to think of murdering me. Oh dear, no; his object was simply, by occasioning some injuries, to disable me, and so at once put an end to the idea of my marrying, render me entirely dependent on his care, and, perchance, by the mental bewilderment consequent on being half roasted, to make me likely enough to forget for a time the questions which had arisen so unpleasantly for him in the course of the day. As it happened, I saw the fire, and jumped out of bed. Seeing his purpose balked, Vidocq pretended hysterical fear of the lightning to account for his neglect to rouse me, and to extinguish the flames. For a moment I suspected nothing, and then I remembered an occasion on which he had shown no unusual terror in the presence of a thunderbolt, and at the same time I noticed that the curtains and drapery of the bed were burning in a way which rather indicated the deliberate firing of them. Since then, the fellow's manner has confirmed this view of the affair. And so, my dear Wilmotte, things are in train, ha, ha, ha!"

The Doctor looked apprehensive again.

"You will do nothing rashly, Lockart. Remember your sister," he said anxiously.

"My gentle Edith! Rash! Mark how I have taken these successive discoveries; with calmness—cheerfulness—laughter! I'm not the sort of man I was. When that unmitigated scoundrel convinced me of my poor wife's ruin, how did I behave? Like a lunatic simply. Passion-blind, devil-possessed, did I allow Annette a chance of justifying herself? None. But now? why, this morning I charmed Vidocq by my helplessness! I could hardly comb my hair! I asked Vidocq if he did not think Miss Grange had shown a slight lack of delicacy in coolly distributing water for the fire among half-attired grooms, and he confessed that such a thought had crossed his mind! I asked him if he had not some recollection of having heard Lady Lockart reprove her maid with great asperity, and if he did not fancy it possible that that might have influenced Annette in the concoction of her scandal fully as much as the wish to revenge herself on him, Vidocq. Again he acquiesced—very cordially! And now, to pursue the interrogative system, I may ask you, Wilmotte, if you think it likely that a man possessed of sufficient self-control so to play upon a dangerous devil like my valet is likely to be carried away by passion?"

"I am indeed gratified by your coolness, Sir Angus, and I can well believe that your nerves have recovered a healthy tone, comparatively speaking. I can hardly imagine, however, that your sister will easily reconcile herself to Vidocq's stay at Beechworth even for an hour."

"Pooh, pooh, she doesn't know yet—Ha, I see her

among the evergreens yonder, flirting with Captain Calvert—she doesn't know that I've found Vidocq out. Nor can I well tell her. I would fain clear up a few points first, and I see no occasion for parting with the rascal immediately. His time will come; but for the present, as he is not aware how my eyes have been opened, I propose to employ him as usual, though with caution."

Wilmotte shook his head, and looked grave.

"It is a dangerous game when you have to do with a man who, though perhaps for the moment outwitted, is too subtle not to be alive to the slightest change in your manner even. I wouldn't put myself needlessly in his power if I were you, especially after an experience like that of last night."

"Fear not, good Doctor, fear not. Self-interest is his ruling passion. He will not injure me save to his own advantage. As for malice, he has nothing to revenge excepting favours. In good society these are perhaps hard to bear, but in his position a man may even feel grateful for them. Mere revengefulness would not have made him run any risk in traducing my wife. His strongest desire was to secure his place, which could only be done by turning her out of hers. No, no, Vidocq's avarice and selfishness are my shield, so far as, at least, my life is concerned. Would you mind walking round that clump of bushes?"

Wilmotte hesitated a moment before he understood the request, and then he walked smartly to the other side of the bushes indicated, and cast his eyes behind sundry others.

"No one visible," he said, returning to the chair.

"Thank you; I did not suppose any one was there.

I've had my eye on every suspicious point from the first, but it's as well to take precautions. I have no doubt Vidocq is safe at home. I told him, truthfully enough, that I might take a fancy to return at any moment."

Wilmotte felt reassured by the perfect calmness with which Angus spoke, and he no longer dreaded such an outbreak of wrath as would be likely to get his patient into a serious scrape.

"How shall I apologize to Miss Grange for keeping you from her so long, Doctor? I totally forgot your engagement. Pray go. I'm covered with confusion. Never mind me, I'll steer my way back to the house. Now off, off and away. Confound my long tongue!"

Wilmotte lingered a moment only through politeness, and little pressing was needed to make him withdraw as soon as he decently could.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN Miss Grange and her cousin, after a longish detour to occupy time, approached the Gowans' cottage on their visit to little Espie, the doors were open as usual. In consequence of this arrangement, the young ladies had a view of what was going forward in Espie's room before its inmates were aware of their arrival.

On an inverted box sat Kate Gowans busy peeling turnips, and on a stool close at her side was Tom Crocket, Captain Calvert's servant. Kate was pouting and laughing alternately, and Tom, in equally good spirits, was kissing her at intervals, an amusement which seemed to afford the highest gratification to Maggie Miller, who, standing not far off, dandled her baby in ecstasy after every kiss.

Miss Grange paused and thought of turning back, but just then Tom observed her. With ever so slight a touch of confusion, he doffed his forage cap and jumped to his feet, nearly upsetting, as he did so, a dish of water into which cleanly Kate was dropping her peeled turnips. Kate, thus disturbed, looked up in turn and her cheeks grew rather hot, while Tom bowed his way past the ladies and slipped out of the cottage.

"That is really a very sensible young man," remarked Miss Mary Melville in a tone of impartial criticism, as

she tripped into the room and looked admiringly at Kate's glowing face. "So Tom Crocket is your sweet-heart now? I had an idea that you rather favoured Mrs. Doherty's grandson Pike."

Kate, who had risen to her feet, smoothed down her apron, and, after a momentary side glance at Maggie, said,—

"I kent Tam afore Pike, miss. I'm dune wi' Pike."

"Come and speak to Espie, Mary," said Miss Grange, interposing before her cousin could answer Kate.

Mary knew as yet nothing of Maggie Miller's interest in Pike, and so was not aware that she was treading on delicate ground in speaking of him, but she obeyed Marian and went up to Espie's cot, casting, as she did so, a slightly inquisitive glance at Maggie; for she prided herself upon knowing all the farm and village women in the neighbourhood, and Maggie's face was new to her.

"How do you do, Espie, dear?" she said, patting the pretty child.

But Espie engaged her attention only for a moment. Turning sharp round on Maggie, she looked at her attentively again.

"Was it your child that was rescued on the cliff?" she asked eagerly.

Marian had forgotten to tell her that she might expect to see the child in this cottage,

"Ay was it, mem," replied Maggie, proudly holding up her infant. "The bonny wee moosie—an' she's nane the waur, nane at a'. It'll be a fine tale for her tae tell a' her days when she's grown up; will it no, mem?"

Her pretty though sickly face brightened, and she

seemed still to feel no contrition for her own share in the child's adventure ; and, indeed, apparently regarded its swing on the rowan-tree as a piece of great luck, now that it had ended so happily.

Mary hesitated a moment, being somewhat puzzled by the young woman's way of treating the matter, and then, without more ado, she picked the child from its mother's arms and kissed it several times.

"Just fancy Archer's having saved its life at the risk of his own, Mar!" she said in an explanatory tone to Marian, who was looking a little surprised, for Mary in general professed to despise babies.

"Are you going to stay in this neighbourhood?" she added, turning to Maggie.

"We're thinking sae," answered Kate, seeing that tears were rising in Maggie's eyes.

"Then, I'll see the child now and then," said Mary quietly.

This meant that she would take the first opportunity of giving the infant a new frock, and that she would keep it supplied with such things as babies can be supposed to like while she remained in the country.

"Dear little thing. Such black eyes it has!" she continued.

"His ain een," said the mother, "I'm his wife—Pike's."

"Oh, Mrs. Doherty, I beg pardon. I really didn't know," murmured Mary, glancing at Kate, and looking uneasy.

"Presently she restored the babe to its mother, and, a little put out, rejoined Marian at the side of Espie's bed.

The gipsy-like girl was quietly allowing Marian to plait her hair.

"I should think the Doctor will let you get up to-day," said Marian.

The child's eyes sparkled, and she moved about her little limbs as if impatient to use them on the ground. Then she smelt at some flowers which Miss Grange had brought in, and sighed with pleasure.

"I'll no be sich a fash tae everybody when I'm up again," she said thoughtfully.

"Good child," said Mary, who, already softened by the sight of Archer's baby, as she thenceforth styled Maggie's infant, felt quite touched by the little girl's considerate remark.

Taking a small white hand in hers she stroked it gently. Yet, somehow, Mary was uneasy. She felt in her back, as it were, that Mrs. Doherty, junior, whom she could not well account for, was still in the room, and that made her nervous.

"I don't think we need wait here for Ellis," she said softly to her cousin. "We may as well be walking on to the Ivy Cot—don't you think so?"

"Yes, Espie won't keep him a minute here. Good-bye, dear, the doctor will be with you presently. Tell him we've gone on to Mrs. Doherty's, will you?"

"Ay, mem, I'll no forget. Gude-day, miss."

Mary turned and poked a finger playfully into each of the baby's cheeks, and then passed out without looking again at its mother.

Kate saw the young ladies to the door, and whispered to Miss Grange that she might tell the old widow that Maggie was all right, and that she, Kate, would take good care that Pike did not get his hands on her.

Marian smiled, and the tall maiden curtsied in her

stately fashion, while the two little ones nodded to her and marched off.

They walked smartly, but that did not prevent Mary ruminating. Marian was thoughtful too, so they were some distance from the cottage before either spoke. At length Mary sighed and said,—

“I wish I'd been with you there.

“Where, dear?”

“At the cliff. Poor dear Archer, to think of him throwing himself away upon Bracy, when he might easily have guessed my fancy for him! Just his luck; always getting into some scrape. However, it's a comfort to think that he has a way of landing on his feet at last.”

“What! you don't despair of getting him yet?” asked Marian with assumed gravity.

“I'm hopeful at least that the loss of me may not prove disastrous in the long-run. Edith may really appreciate him. You wonder at me, and think I must be playing fast and loose with Mr. Eagle when I can speak so warmly of Archer? Well, I don't mind. You're a little prude, and can't understand me. I was in a pretty flurry about Mr. Eagle yesterday, and made sundry desperate resolutions; but I don't seem to care about him to-day, comparatively speaking, and I half imagine that I'll leave him to Polly, who will be very grateful, poor dear.”

Mary spoke quite despondingly. Archer's baby kept recurring to her mind. The brave little saviour of its miserable life was, she felt assured, going speedily to be lost to her. She would have no more romps with him; no more blindman's buff; no more larks in the hay field. He'd soon be a married man, most likely; and

that just when a feat of daring, of which she had scarcely believed even him capable, had made him twice her hero.

So bright little Mary felt dull for a minute or two, and counted twice over on her fingers the years from that of her birth, to reassure herself that she was still a good bit under eighteen.

Then, suddenly, her thoughts recurred to another topic, and she exclaimed :

"I say, Mar, what's this about the child's mother being Mrs. Pike Doherty? You didn't tell me of his marriage, and you know I expect all the gossip of the country from you."

"There's something uncertain about it, dear," answered Marian very seriously. "The girl says Pike married her at another farm, where he worked before he came here, and she turned up yesterday at the widow's to claim him. But he wouldn't have her, and so she went distracted and climbed to the top of the precipice, we don't know with what object."

"Then she threw the child over?" cried Mary, aghast.

"No, dear, we're sure she didn't do that, for we saw her stumble when startled by our party arriving just under her, and we saw the babe drop accidentally from her. But we are not sure but she may have thought of—"

"Of murdering it by throwing it over if you hadn't appeared? The wretch, if I had known that!"

"But we don't know anything about it, Mary. She may, when half mad with grief, have thought of leaping off the cliff, babe and all; but none of us liked to ask her, poor thing, she seemed so fearfully happy when the child was got safe down."

"In that case," said Mary, propitiated, "we need not condemn her unheard; but I'll be at the bottom of it ere long."

"I wouldn't advise you, Mary. 'Tisn't of a bit use. She'll not do it again, I'm certain; and as she's very fond of the child, as one may see, nothing but misery beyond measure could have made her think of parting with it, or of killing herself."

"Gin onybody's tae blame," said Mrs. Doherty's voice close beside the girls, for they had reached Ivy Cottage, and the widow was seated in the sun on a bench beside its door,—*"Gin onybody's tae blame,"* she repeated, "it is raither Pike than the lass. Had the puir demented thing flung her bairn ower the rocks I'd hae been for hanging Pike for it, and no her. No but what I'd hae hidden him frae the law as lang's I could, he being o' my ain flesh and blude; but, gin my opinion were asked, young leddies, I wad shurely say that, gin onybody was tae be hung, it wad need tae be the faither o' the bairn, wha fau'sly disowned it. My auld blood boils when I think o' men wha ken the oots and ins o' things sending a puir lass tae the gallows, and letting gang scot free the damnable—the Lord kens I'm nae sweerer—the damnable ruffian wha led her on tae destruction."

The fiery little woman had risen from her seat, and she struck the ground with her staff in her emphatic style, while her young-like eyes sparkled, and the wrinkles of her withered face quivered together.

The girls, talking somewhat earnestly, had come upon her unawares, and being first startled by her unexpected voice, and then embarrassed by her choice of a subject, and very uncompromising mode of treating it, they stood beside her rather at a loss what to say.

"But it's maybe no tae the like o' you, young leddies, that sich things need be said," the widow resumed after a brief pause. "I thought I heard ye speakin' o' the lass Maggie and Pike's bairn, the which are eneuch tae mak e'en an auld body's tongue camsterie."

"How is your arm to-day, Mrs. Doherty?" asked Marian, to change the subject.

"Oh, mendin', miss," replied the old woman, already restored to her wonted equanimity, and preparing to show the way into the cottage.

"Dr. Wilmotte is coming to see you," said Marian, "so I think we may as well wait among your flowers."

"Ye're welcome, miss, though we've no mony oot the noo in the yaird."

The widow threw open a wicket as she spoke, and the girls entered her little garden.

"Such big roses!" cried Mary, raising a great cabbage-rose which had lain down on the walk through sheer inability to hold up its heavy head. "May I take this one, Mrs. Doherty?"

"Ou ay, miss, an' as mony mair as ye like."

"Thank you; this will satisfy me. What a beauty it is, and so delicious! Smell it, Marian. I do so like these old roses. I feel half a tory when I smell them. There comes Ellis at last. Ho! Doctor, what a time you've taken! Did you ever see a rose like this among the new-fashioned ones?"

Wilmotte came forward to the low garden-wall, and, though somewhat out of breath, leant over to smell the rose which Mary held out to him.

"Very sweet," he said, with his eyes fixed on Marian Grange, who happened to be propping up a carnation with a withered stick.

Thus employed, she did not meet his glance, which therefore was withdrawn and turned upon Mary, whose eyes were blinking in the sun as they watched his expression.

"Now's your time," whispered Mary in his ear ; "you may have Marian to yourself, as I'll undertake the widow."

Wilmotte smiled and shook his head, and having bent his face to the delicious rose again, and again with his eyes on Marian, he passed on to the cottage door, followed by his old patient.

Ten minutes afterwards, when the Doctor and Mrs. Doherty reappeared, Miss Grange was still occupied in setting up straggling bushes with the aid of such props as happened to be at hand.

"I aye kent ye for a handy lass, miss," said the widow encouragingly.

"Folk whiles come by waur things than a handy wife, sir," she added, turning to Wilmotte, who, it is to be confessed, coloured as she looked at him sharply.

"Would Marian but look at him now !" thought Mary, "I never knew such a disappointing girl !"

The disappointing girl did look up presently, but it was only at Mary, and to remark, "I suppose we'd better be going home now."

Mary pouted her lips with a vexed air.

"Let's be off then, since you're both stupid," she cried, tossing her curls.

Adieux were said to the old woman, and the three presently started on their return to Ashcroft.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HAVING been ordered to shift a manure heap, which inconveniently blocked up a gate in one of the farthest out fields of the Ashcroft estate, Pike Doherty saw nothing of Maggie's doings on Craig Law cliff, and when in the evening he returned to his grandmother's cottage, the old body and her feeble brother Hugh had not yet heard of them—their dwelling standing at a distance from the farmyard, and apart from all the other labourers' houses. During the evening he remained at home brooding and sulking, and utterly refusing to enter into conversation with his venerable relatives. Next morning he was up betimes, and having supplied himself with materials for a breakfast, and rolled them in a blue cotton handkerchief, he trudged off unseen to finish his lonely job of removing the manure heap. In this way it happened, that when soon after eleven o'clock his labours had cleared the gate, and he set out on his return to the farm-place, he had not heard of Maggie since his savage outbreak upon her in the cottage the day before.

But though he had not heard of the well-nigh tragical result of his violence, he had thought of the girl. Knowing the softness and timidity of her nature, he had readily supposed that his strong language must

have scared her away from the district, and that for a time at least she would leave him alone. No apprehension of meeting her on his way to the farm-offices had troubled him, but if he had felt himself safe for the moment, he had not deceived himself so far as to hope that he was likely altogether to have got rid of her importunities. They would come upon him through his grandmother or some of the neighbours, and even in Maggie's personal absence he would be harassed by her appeals; while, should her story get wind and be believed, his character would be gone, and some in whose opinion he desired to stand well would look askance at him. Kate Gowans, for instance, would surely scorn him. But, above all, a few weeks might bring upon him a nailer, in the shape of letters from abroad substantiating Maggie's claims upon him by proving his marriage.

Turning over such matters in his mind while he worked, Pike had not been long of arriving at the conclusion that the sooner he disappeared from Ashcroft the better would be his chance of escaping in some measure from the consequences of his baseness, and so, even before it was time for him to munch his breakfast, he had quite determined to take a speedy leave of his relatives, and betake himself to some part of the country where as yet his multiplied vices had not made his name a byword. A splendid fellow such as he was could command the labour market anywhere. He had only to show himself on a farm, not already over-peopled, to be sure of instant employment. But one thing still troubled him. Must he give up Kate, a girl, as far as his experience went, almost peerless among farm hands? That was not to be thought of without

a good reason. He did not know that she had stepped into his grandmother's kitchen, after overhearing the gentle terms in which he addressed his wife through the broken pane in the window, and, of course, he knew nothing of her subsequent connexion with the unfortunate Maggie. Kate might, he considered, have as yet failed to hear of Maggie's appearance and pretensions. She might still be unprejudiced against him. That she had hitherto received his addresses with a good deal of tolerance he was confident, and that, if duly urged, she might consent to an early marriage, or even to go north with him under an engagement, did not appear to him very improbable, favourably received as he had hitherto been by his rural belles. But to be successful he must be active, every moment was of consequence, since at any time Kate might hear of the claims Maggie had set up.

Thus it came to pass that on his return to the farm Pike's step was longer, if not lighter than usual, and that, anxious to reach the Gowans' cottage as early as possible, he even trotted for a while along the road, as was afterwards testified by Tom Crocket, who, turned out of the cottage by the arrival there of Miss Grange and Miss Mary Melville, happened to be entering Ashcroft gate just as Pike passed it.

It was not Pike's habit when he visited Kate to go boldly into her cottage and seat himself beside her before whomsoever might happen to be there, as Tom Crocket, in the simplicity of his honest heart, had done a little before he saw Pike hurry past the gate. No; Pike always went more quietly to work. First, he made an inspection of the cottage from the outside, and then having satisfied himself that Kate was really

within, his plan was to whistle in a peculiar style, which he had taught her to recognise. If Kate had a mind to see him, she, on hearing the whistle, would go out and indulge him by loitering about the ruins of Craig Castle for half an hour or so. If she had not a mind to see him, she would ignore his whistle, and Pike would retire in dudgeon, cursing her coquettishness, but not daring to do more; for, after all, strong as he was, handsome Kate had wrists as well-sinewed as his own.

Having passed Tom at the gate, Pike, on the present occasion, was on the point of going forward to the cottage, that is of dodging up to it from various corners whence he could approach it somewhat covertly, when he was arrested by seeing Miss Grange and Miss Melville coming out accompanied by Kate. At the moment he was not concealed, and Kate observed him while she was giving Miss Grange her message about Maggie to the widow Doherty.

Pike paused and glanced at her sharply to see how she seemed inclined towards him, and she, as soon as the ladies had left her, nodded to him cheerfully and advanced to meet him. Encouraged by this, Pike walked on and bade her good-morning with as much ease as he was master of at the moment.

"Weel, Pike, hae ye gotten the dung shifted, lad? Naebody's seen ye this four-and-twenty oors, I'm thinkin'?" said Kate cheerfully, as if she had nothing on her mind.

Pike, well assured by her familiar tone that she had neither seen nor heard of Maggie Miller, drew himself up complacently, and, cocking his head on one side, said with a knowing wink—

"Dang me but she's a rare one."

Kate understanding that the compliment was intended for herself curtsayed mockingly, and murmured,—

“Your servant, sir.”

Then she rose upright and walked away quietly towards the castle ruin. Pike accompanied her, and they went among the ivied walls together.

“Weel?” said Kate, sitting down, or up rather, on a tall stone which afforded accommodation for one only, while she, somewhat imperiously, signed to Pike to sit on a smaller stone opposite.

Pike felt the disadvantage at which he was placed by this arrangement, but being anxious by every means to propitiate the haughty damsel, he quietly betook himself to the stone indicated, and stuck his dung-fork in the ground before him so as to have its handle to lean on.

“Weel,” repeated Kate, “ye were comin’ tae see me, belike? I’ve no had a word o’ ye since I spilt the Frenchy up the burn yonder.”

Pike laughed hoarsely.

“Haw, haw, haw, ’twas weel dune, Kate, an’ a’ in a jiffy; haw, haw, haw! Ye’re an’ awfu’ bissome, Kate!”

It did not escape the observant damsel on the high stone that his laugh was somewhat forced, and that he probably thought of the valet’s misfortune more as a warning than as a joke to be freely enjoyed just then.

“Ye’ve no seen Vidocq again, hae ye?” he asked, as if rather at a loss what to say.

“No; I’m feared he thinks he’s had eneuch o’ me, for it’s no the first cuff in the lug I’ve had tae gie him. I wadna hae hit sae hard gin I’d thought better o’ it, for he has a genty tongue, an’ a body may be fashed mair than by hearing their ain praises in bonny speeches

fu' o' funny-soondin' words. But what's come ower yer ain tongue, man? Hae ye left it in the midden at the gate?"

Pike was in truth cowed by the maiden's easy non-chalance, and he felt much at a loss how to commence what he had proposed to say. At length, with his hands on the handle of the fork, and his chin resting on his knuckles, he tried the effect of a good long and, as he thought, eloquent stare at her well-favoured face.

"What are ye glowerin' at, man?" demanded Kate, after quietly submitting to his would-be ardent gaze for a minute or two. "Ye've seen the like o' me afore, I'm thinkin'?"

"I'm no sae sure o' that, Kate," growled Pike, much relieved by the help her question afforded him. "I ne'er seed a bonnier lass or a bigger in a' my days, an' gin ye'll no gie me a smack o' yer bonny mou jist tae show that ye'll hae me, lass, I dinna weel ken what ye'll drive me tae."

"Weel, Pike," replied Kate in a pitying tone, "ye are the maist backward wooer I've faun in wi' yet. But it wasna aye sae, ye'd spunk eneuch, lad, whan ye cam first. What's come ower ye, what's made ye sae blate a' on a sudden, eh, man?"

"Damn me, what maks ye think I'm blate, lass? a man canna hug an' sit on a stane a mile aff; curse the stane!" cried Pike, jumping up and going forward to Kate.

He appeared to have thought for a moment of putting his arm round her, but he was awed by a calm scorn in her eye, and stood irresolute beside her, with rather a foolish expression in his tanned face.

"Ha, ha, ha," she laughed, "ye're a queer ane. I

thought ye'd mare mettle, man. Sure ye used tae speak big enuch for seeven. Hae ye chanced on a ghost ony gate? But true love is aye blate, and cauld grows the love that kindles ower het at the ootset!"

"Oh, but ye're a fash, Kate, whan ye set on a man like that! Twenty men couldna haud yer tongue whan it taks tae bletherin'."

"An' hoo do ye think it wad sound, man, at yer ain ingle-side? Are ye no feared tae think what a randy wife I'd mak ye?"

Pike did look as if he had some such feeling; but then Kate was certainly the handsomest girl he knew, and her lips were very red, and her teeth very white, and her cheeks were very rosy, and her eyes, if rather imperious and haughty at times, were beautiful and full of love-provoking roguery, and, in short, he was enslaved by her charms whenever he ventured to survey them.

"Ye're a cheerie lass, Kate, spite o' a' yer claver," he answered, trying to look very tender, which, with a conscience ill at ease, and an apprehension of being found out in some unlooked-for way, he did not find it a very easy thing to do.

Seeing, probably, that she would spoil the fun she had promised herself if she persevered in snubbing the worthy youth, Kate now affected to look bashful, and, to that end, hung her head demurely.

Pike, greatly emboldened, fairly put his arm round her waist, and gave her a moderate hug, to which she submitted quietly.

"Kate, woman, I never lo'ed but yersel," he said.

"My certy, what a lee!" cried the damsel, half forgetting the part she had proposed to play.

“As sure as death, Kate, it’s heaven’s ain truth.”

Kate shuddered with disgust.

“Mony’s the lass I’ve keepit company wi’, I’ll no deny that; but damn me if ever I cast eyes on ane like you, Kate! Farthin’ candles in the sunshine wad look better nor ony o’ them aside you.”

Kate became very red, but it was in struggling to look douce and grave.

“Weel, honey,” she said very gently, when she found that he had come to a stand again. “Ye’re really thinkin’ tae tie a knot wi’ yer tongue that ye canna loose wi’ yer teeth?”

“Ay, Kate, wi’ you I’d stick at naething; an’ gin ye’ll hae me, I’m no for waitin’. What’s tae be canna be ower sune gotten ower, ye ken.”

“Like caster-ile, or senna-tea, ye wad say?”

“Ye’re a comical craetur, Kate. Dang me, what a wut ye hae, haw, haw! But wull ye come, lass? I’m keen tae get oot o’ this, an’ fain tae tak a jaunt north, whar I ken o’ a grieve’s place that wad suit me fine, wi’ a Maister M’Loupel, nigh Crieff. Gin I’m no there by the middle o’ next week the place’ll be filled up, sae jist come yer ways, lass, withoot mair ado. The neighbours may claver, but what signifies, we’ll be oot o’ hearin’ afore they’ve weel begun. Better a grieve’s wife than a ploughman’s ony day.”

“Ye’re speerin’ gin I’ll marry ye aff hand, and gang tae Crieff, or gang tae Crieff richt away, and marry ye there?”

“That’s it, my dearie. Wi’ yer ain Pike, ye ken!”

“I’ll no say but ye’ve a way wi’ ye, Pike, man; but dinna rug at me that gate, an’ jist keep yer mou tae yersel till it’s wanted. Gie’s a hand doon frae this stane. That’ll dae.”

"Ye're sich a bashfu' lass, Kate! But I'll no anger ye, my doo. Ye're no gaun in yet, are ye? No without fixin', surely? Mind the place'll no bide for me. Ye maun catch water whan the heavens are open gin ye wadna be drouthie in hairst."

"Weel, Pike, ye're real coaxing. Wad ye like tae see my new bonnet that I've gotten ready for the kirk next Sabbath? Ye'll maybe be for sayin' I thought o' somebody whan I boucht it, eh man? Come yer ways ower, and see't through the window, at ony rate. What are ye feared for? My faither aye says, says he, there's nane turns a midden half sae handy as Pike!"

"Wha said I was feared, lass? But I wadna be for sayin' oucht aboot oor bit business tae yer faither the noo. Thae auld carles tak odd freaks whiles, an' mind ye, dearie, the time's but short. It wadna do tae hae yer faither sticking a spoke in oor wheel afore we'd got weel startit."

"Ye needna fash aboot my faither. I ken that happy is the wooin' that's no lang o' doin'! Jist gie a cast o' yer bonny een intil the hoose, wull ye? Ye'll maybe see the bonnet hinging on the wa', if no something that mair concerns ye. Look ye noo; that way."

They had strolled to the cottage, and Kate thus directed her sweetheart to look through the bright panes of one of the front windows, within which the cottage cat happened to be dozing in the sunshine.

Pike, quite unsuspecting, flattened his nose upon the glass, and stared into the room, which, small as the window was, his figure did not much darken—sufficient light entering it from the window at the end of the house. It was the room in which Espie lay when the young ladies from Ashcroft paid her morning visit.

The Doctor had been to see her for a minute or two, while Kate was flirting with Pike among the ruins, and he had authorized her to get up and sit in the sun for an hour. When Pike looked in, Espie was already dressed and seated on a low chair, with Maggie's infant in her lap. Maggie herself was kneeling in front of the little girl, and her back was to the front window. Pike, thinking only of, though not caring much for the new bonnet, scarcely gave the group a moment's attention at first, but ran his eye over the walls in quest of the bonnet. There was a bonnet certainly. He took as long a look at it as he thought Kate would exact, and was on the point of withdrawing himself, when Maggie, noticing his shadow on her babe, turned her face to the window. His face being in shade, and the sunlight strong behind his head, she did not recognise him, but he knew her instantly, and started back. For a moment he stood irresolute a foot from the window, and still staring into the room, then, clenching his teeth by a desperate effort, for they had begun to clatter, he put forward his face again, and glared in upon his wife and child, as if to make thoroughly sure of their identity. Maggie had at once looked back to her child, quite indifferent about the inquisitive stranger. Pike could therefore observe her undisturbed, and note leisurely, even while trembling with mixed dismay and rage, that her dress proved plainly that she was for the moment at least domesticated in the house. Assured of that, Pike turned at last, white with passion and apprehension, and looked Kate in the face as fully as he dared. A bitter, scornful smile played on her fine lips, and a corresponding scorn and triumph shone from her dark eyes upon her baffled lover.

Pike understood his position in a moment. Kate had been making game of him ! She had harboured Maggie, and Maggie had told her everything ! For an instant he felt prompted to fly at Kate, and maul her to the ground, woman though she was ; but he restrained himself, and stood glaring at her, with clenched and yet quivering hands. Calmly she returned his stare, pure scorn more and more prevailing in her expression, till her gaze was withering, and the cowardly black-guard shrank from her with a lowering scowl, and seemed but half the man he was an hour before.

Not a word was spoken, for not a syllable was needed to explain their feelings. Pike knew that he was rejected, detested, and yet not feared, and Kate saw how perfectly her expression was read.

With a slouching gait, and down-hearted air, at last Pike turned away, and walked off biting his lips till the blood flowed.

Kate stood still, and calmly watched his retreat, with a smile that gradually changed from bitter to sad, until, in a second or two, her expression was sorrowful, and even pitying. Pike, after all, was her cousin, and a surpassingly good-looking fellow ! It was grievous to see what he had become through mortification and impotent passion.

"Pike, man !" she cried, when he had got some twenty yards off.

She thought of throwing a word of forgiveness after him—a word of comfort, even for the poor wretch.

At her voice he looked round, and, possibly misapprehending her object, broke into a fury, gnashing his teeth, and stamping on the ground like a madman, and hurled at the damsel a storm of abuse and blasphemy, which it is unnecessary to write here.

For a little Kate's temper got the better of her, and she felt fain to cast back Pike's words in his teeth; but she mastered the evil spirit, and merely walked towards the speaker with her fists clenched, and ready at her side for self-defence.

Pike's violence abated a little as she advanced, and he gave ground, but slowly.

"Pike," said Kate at length, when the fellow had exhausted every epithet he could remember, and a good many which he had coined for the occasion, "Pike, man, dinna think that I'll bear ye ill-will for this. I liked ye whiles, and I'm no ane tae throw ower a friend even for words like thae, gin he's willin' tae hear reason."

Pike bit his lip rather less, indeed it was already paining him horribly, and he wondered what the lass might mean.

"Damn yer sleekit words, woman, what're ye drivin' at?" he growled.

"Pike, dear," she went on in a propitiatory tone, "ye're my cousin, and it's no for me tae scorn ye. Ye angered me, and sae I was tempted tae fash ye a bit; but that's ower, and gin ye'll behave like an honest man, Pike, I'll forgi'e a' yer haverin', and ne'er think again o' yer ha'in' been minded tae mak me marry ye whan ye had a wife already. I'll ne'er cast that in yer face, Pike, a' my days again, gin ye come noo an tak that lassie by the hand and own tae the bairn, puir wee thing. There, will ye come?"

Pike failed to answer her through sheer amazement. Voluntarily to burden himself at this time of day with Maggie and her bairn, and just in order to be called cousin by Kate, that was a notion indeed! and so he

stood open-mouthed in wonder, blood dropping from his bitten lips.

"Ah, Pike, man," Kate went on, not heeding, perhaps not understanding his expression to the full. "Pike, man, I've kent ye this while noo, and surely canna think that ye're just sae bad as tae leave this pu craetur, wha lo'es ye still though she fears ye, tae ster or gang on the parish. Come noo, gie's yer hand a we're friends again."

"Weel, ye *are* the biggest fule, Kate, that ever I seen on! Peety me that I should hae thought tae teth mysel' tae sich a saft tawpey. Bless yer bonny blaw een, Kate. I wish ye gude-day and a wiser heid!"

Having turned on his heel as he spoke, the tall fellow presently marched off holding up his head with uncovered dignity.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was during the preceding interview between Kate Gowans and her cousin Pike that Dr. Wilmotte and his fair friends returned from their brief visit to the widow's cottage.

The Squire had engaged the whole breakfast party to remain to a light luncheon in the hay-field near the house—bidding them meanwhile amuse themselves where they pleased. On arriving at Ashcroft door, Marian reminded Wilmotte of his promise not to hurry to town, and then, giving him a sort of congé till one o'clock, went into the house, carrying Mary with her.

"We girls are to have a gossip by ourselves for a while lest we should bore you gentlemen," said Mary as she entered.

Ellis, thus alone, loitered along the gravel. He saw no one except, at some distance, Calvert and Miss Lockart returning across a field. Unwilling to disturb them, he turned to the flower-garden. Lockart was no longer there. At its western extremity a long rustic seat stood invitingly on the gauze-like shadow of a birch tree. Ellis stretched himself upon it, prepared to sleep or meditate as his humour might direct.

His spirits were at low ebb, and thinking did not apparently tend much to raise them, for ere long his

countenance indicated a fixed despondency. But thinking, whether painfully or pleasantly in warm weather, is fatiguing even under the shade of zephyr stirred leaves, and in less than ten minutes the wheel of Wilmotte's mind began to linger, to get themselves entangled, to jar upon each other, and thus to work confusedly or even to intermit work altogether. In short, he dozed, jerked, double-dozed, and then fell asleep.

Two sides of the mansion-house commanded a perfect view of the garden seat on which he reclined, and therefore from the seat a view was in turn to be had of the house.

Strictly speaking,* Ashcroft is not a new place, but Mr. Grange, with an eye to comfort rather than picturesqueness, has so much added to and modernized it that it might readily enough pass for a recent erection, in a very mixed style. It was at one time extremely irregular in outline; not exactly a house with wings, but rather a lot of wings stuck together on various occasions with a confused effect. The Squire, sensitive in winter to draughts and the chilliness of rooms, of which the walls were exposed to the open air, began his alterations by filling in most of the recesses. He by this means gave the house a compactness which, while taking from the originality of its appearance, certainly made it look vastly more substantial, and ten-fold increased its warmth. It is now, and was while Ellis Wilmotte lay on the garden-seat facing its north-west corner, a nearly square and very commodious-looking mansion with windows of various sizes, and a roof of many gables running up here and there into chimney-stalks of sundry shapes and different ages. Some variety is given

to its walls by ivy, which, climbing up and accumulating in masses at two or three points, goes far to restore some of that picturesqueness of outline which made Ashcroft a favourite subject for the sketcher's pencil in the days of Mr. Grange's father. Walks and lawns encompass the mansion on three sides, and even on the fourth the shrubbery approaches only a small part of it. A porch at the north-east corner shelters the principal door, and a very large skylight near the centre of the house gives light to a hall and stair communicating with the rooms on every side.

But it cannot be pretended that the hall was visible from Wilmotte's couch of twisted oak boughs, or that any one in it could have distinguished the Doctor's face as he slept in the birch-tree's shadow.

How many laughing eyes saw him from the windows I do not reveal, but at any rate one pair glanced at him now and again from a balcony which crosses the west end of the house.

Calvert having returned with Miss Lockart, had been sitting on this balcony smoking a cigar for a few minutes before he observed Wilmotte's recumbent figure, and for some time he abstained from disturbing his friend. At last, however, he grew impatient, and looked about for something to throw at him. Brushes, combs, tooth-powder boxes, were in turn considered, but in the end nothing seemed more eligible than a round ball of red soap. This he picked up, and after tossing it and catching it in the room a few times to test its gravity, he stepped on to the balcony again, and pitched it with so accurate an aim that it alit on the Doctor's chest, and made him start to his feet amazed. Archer said nothing, but waited composedly until his friend, having looked in

every direction but the right one, at last caught sight of the soap ball, and picked it up with a prescient glance at Calvert's window.

"Hope you feel refreshed, Ellis," said Archer, when by-and-by the Doctor entered his dressing-room.

"Thank you," replied the latter, looking at his watch to see how long he had slept, and, as he reached the wash-stand, returning the soap ball to its box. "Yes, do feel all the better."

Throwing off his coat and neck-tie, he plunged his head into a basin of water. That seemed to rouse him effectually, and when, soon afterwards, he carried a chair out to the balcony and seated himself in front of his friend, he no longer looked either sleepy or despondent.

"This is a very snug arrangement, isn't it?" said Calvert, handing over his cigar-case.

He alluded to his bed-room and dressing-room, the latter half a parlour, and especially to the convenience of having a balcony to smoke on.

The Doctor nodded, and lit a cigar.

"You don't regret that thump on the head, I suppose?" he said. "You couldn't find pleasanter quarters and the laird is the most hospitable man I know."

"So I imagine; and a thoroughly jovial old boy too. I shouldn't mind having such a father-in-law, should you? Come now, Ellis, no more evasion. I've marked where your eyes settle, and I wish you luck with all my heart."

"You speak of Miss Grange. You are aware how long I have known her—ever since she was quite a child, and she is now past nineteen, though she looks much less."

"Well?"

"Well, do you think it likely that matters would not be finally arranged between Miss Grange and myself by this time were your conjectures not groundless?"

"Do you want to throw me off the scent, or what, Ellis? You have, I think, confessed to a penchant for some one, and that gives me a sort of license to indulge in guesses. I guess Miss Marian, and there can be no doubt rightly. As to its being a settled thing by this time, why, the little damsel has just returned from school, and I daresay you have hardly felt entitled to speak to her hitherto, however much you may have felt inclined to do so. But what are you driving at? You know I am to be trusted."

"I believe you are, Archer, and I don't mind confessing, were it only to ease my mind by speaking instead of brooding, that the girl has interested me more than any other."

"Thank you; that's friendly. Well, then, what's gone wrong? The Squire likes you, and so does the girl."

"Probably Mr. Grange would not object, but that's nothing to the purpose if his daughter has never favoured me except as a friend, and is now partial to one who, I fear, has an eye to her."

"Ho, ho, you allude to Lockart. Well, Ellis, I won't say that I haven't seen him looking at her with evident interest. His attentions on Craigie hill the other day were marked, yet I scarcely imagined that they pointed to anything serious."

"Serious or not," said Ellis, as if a little indignant at the idea of any attentions that were not serious being paid to his little sweetheart, "it is impossible that he can grow intimate with her without becoming serious ;

and, mean he anything or not, should her feelings incline to him, of course I am done for."

"Rather; unless your patience, already well seasoned, should hold out till the damsel's feelings have settled back again into their maiden rest."

"And that is totally out of the question. As it happens, I cannot speak from experience, but I feel perfectly satisfied, that should the hopes I once cherished prove vain now, nothing will ever renew them. To be candid, I have never ventured to hint at my ambition to its object, but she has had every opportunity of acquiring a liking for me, and has also had sufficient evidence of my affection and regard to excuse to herself the indulgence of any favourable inclination. If at this moment she after all cares so little for me, save as a mere friend, as to be willing to favour Angus Lockart, I trust I have sense enough to be no longer her lover in any covetous sense; my desire ceases when I learn her indifference, and henceforth I am, without any taint of selfishness, only her best friend."

"Ha, you are desperately in earnest, I see, and far be it from me to jest when you are so! I do, however, feel willing to pitch into you for your rashness in jumping to the conclusion that Miss Grange is indifferent to you, or inclined to Lockart already. Take a lesson from my case! It is little more than twenty-four hours since I felt so persuaded of Eagle's designs upon Miss Lockart, that I thought it madness to indulge the feelings her sweet eyes had from the first inspired in me, yet now I suspect that he has never thought of her, and that she has as little dreamt of him, much as she admires his holy fervour in the pulpit, to say nothing of his thorough integrity and goodness. Don't laugh at me,

Ellis ; you know I praised him quite as warmly when I thought he stood in my way, and that, indeed, it was the strength of my admiration which made him appear so unconquerable a rival !”

“ I’m not laughing at you, Archie, my boy ; and I am glad to hear that you have hopes in that quarter, though, to tell you the truth, I’m not well able to see how you can reconcile anything of that sort with your attentions to Miss Lushet.”

Archer groaned, but immediately observing that Ellis smiled, he exclaimed,—

“ Now, you don’t mean that ! You’re quizzing me. Well, I deserve it for my ‘ fecklessness.’ You saw how Bracy pounced upon me this morning, and that I could not escape without making a row until the breakfast was over. You understand the way in which I am situated with regard to her, Ellis ; I’m sure you do ?”

“ Yes, I’ve an inkling of the real state of the case. But haven’t you brought it on yourself ? You did monopolize Miss Lushet at one time, and surely it serves you right, and she deserves all consideration, if she is devoted to you now.”

“ I never monopolized her, Ellis !” cried Archer, flinging his cigar away passionately. “ It is too bad to say so when you see how worried I am. I don’t know what I wouldn’t give to have her hate me just at present ! And I declare, on my honour, as I did an evening or two ago, that I have never either wished to monopolize her, or intentionally done so. A complacent and thankful acknowledgment of her kindness and unsolicited affection is the worst that I can charge myself with. This, to be sure, was detestable weakness on my part, as it turns out, and I should have shunned the

dear woman sedulously from the moment she began to treat me with tenderness as well as consideration. But because I did not for long catch a glimpse of the fix was getting into, am I to be badgered to death,—at now of all times? Tell me the truth, Ellis; do you seriously think that Miss Bracy has been counting on me, and imagining that my weak complacency and childish gratitude, and, in a brotherly sense, affection for her meant love? I like plain words. Now speak for something, you see, must be done in the matter once for all."

Wilmotte felt and looked at a loss, and for a while smoked perseveringly to excuse his silence. At length he said slowly,—



"I really have scarcely had the means of judging. The impression among your friends certainly was, that you were in a fair way of coming to a settlement with Miss Lushet, although your respective sizes, if nothing else, did not seem to make the match one greatly to be applauded; for truth to say, Archer, the contrast you offer to each other, not in height merely, but in every respect, is even comical!"

"That's what I have felt from the first dance I had with her, as you know; and hence the fact that it was not till the other day that I conceived the possibility of any mistake on Miss Bracy's part. But the question now is about her feelings. It is out of my power, since yesterday utterly so, to return any wish she may have formed for me; and yet I shrink with my whole soul from telling her so, or suddenly mortifying her in any way. To open her eyes gently, I have been playing courtship under her very nose with Miss Lockart this morning, but the generous creature looks as blind

ever. We met her in the hall as we came in a little ago, and she smiled on me, and even on my companion, with all the sweetness in the world: hoped we had had a nice walk, and had enjoyed it, just as if she herself had kindly sent us out together to amuse ourselves for a while! On my word, Ellis, it is past endurance this horrible long forbearance and unalterable gentleness! Does she rely upon me implicitly, or is it unfailing confidence in her own superior fascination that keeps her so placid when any other woman would fret?"

"I really can't pretend to say, Archer, you are aware that my own acquaintance with her is quite casual. It is mainly at second-hand and chiefly through your own talk that I know anything of her disposition. But, in any case, your fear of paining her is extreme, and, under all the circumstances, I would advise you not to stint yourself of Miss Lockart's society on her account. What people have said of you both she probably does not know, and so the mortification of feeling herself publicly jilted will not be added to her troubles. You cannot gratify her, you say, however plain it should be that she has thought of going out to India with you, and, if so, the sooner she knows that the better. You cannot go and say to her, 'Miss Lushet, you're greatly mistaken if you suppose that I want to marry you,' and, therefore, I see nothing for it but,—in your bearing to show yourself her friend merely, and for the rest, to pay your new love, Miss Lockart, as many attentions as she may be willing to receive."

"Ah, you are a good fellow, Ellis! An honest, sensible fellow! Man, I like you thoroughly. Let me wring your fist. There!"



The impetuous artilleryman squeezed his friend's hand with an energy that nearly drove the blood out of it, large and strong by comparison as Wilmotte's hand was ; and had he been born a Frenchman or a German, undoubtedly he would have saluted his friend's cheeks in gratitude for advice so entirely in accordance with his strongest desires.

Ellis, much amused, laughed at him heartily after his ebullition had somewhat subsided, and, truth to say, felt himself greatly inspirited and refreshed by the indulgence of his risible nerves.

"Would to heaven you would take to heart some of the advice you give so sensibly," said Calvert, resuming his seat and taking a fresh cigar. "Why, Ellis, should not you ask Miss Grange, since you covet her, without regard to Lockart or anybody else? Try your pace with him. Should he beat you, what then, you'll be no worse off than you make yourself in shrinking from a trial just because you are pleased to fancy that the young lady does not dislike him, and that he has half a mind to try for her. My bright little playmate, Mary Melville, often says it is for the lady to decide between her lovers, and it is certainly in no way fair for one of them to withdraw till he has received his congé in explicit terms! Ha, ha, old brick, I can give advice in my turn, you see, and capital advice too!"

"Much obliged, truly ; but there are things a man cannot do, reason on them as he may. I fear it is all up with me ; but at any rate I can do nothing but watch and wait. I'm not Quixotic enough to fight regardless of the odds against me."

"Pooh, pooh ! cheer up, man."

"Oh, I'm cheery enough, good friend. I don't cry

for the moon. One has but to look one's lot in the face and anything may be borne, or even turned to good account."

The Doctor's despondency seemed, indeed, to have in a great measure passed off. "Vainly I have aspired, perchance," he murmured to himself, "but the aspiration was ennobling, and though I withdraw thus suddenly it is without bitterness. Dear to my heart she will be, though it turn out that no responding ardour ever warmed her bosom." And a very good thing it surely was for the honest man that he could bring his mind to so reasonable a view of the subject without getting heartbroken in the attempt.

"Glad you can take it so," answered Calvert, referring to what Wilmotte had said aloud.

"By-the-bye," he added presently, "my fellow Tom, too, has got into this sort of scrape. It seems there's a lass here whom he has long been sweet on. She's called Kate Gowans, and is a regular strapper. Miss Edith told me this morning that she, that is Kate, gave Lockart's valet a box on the ear yesterday that laid him on the grass, and merely for wanting to kiss her,—which was too bad surely."

Wilmotte laughed as he remembered Vidocq's mishap in the meadow.

"Yes," he said, "Kate has a pretty fist of her own, and a fair idea of how to use it, but she's a good-hearted and very handsome lass. Tom's in luck if she prefer him to a rascal here called Pike Doherty, whom she is supposed to like. But he'll need to settle on the farm should he marry Kate."

"Well, it isn't easy to see how I could spare him, and yet I am a good deal shaken in my plan of taking him

to the East with me. For one thing, I suspect he has a mind to go, owing to Kate, perhaps."

"Very likely he hasn't. Where's Eagle at present do you know?"

"Oh, he went off to the village, Linbrook, to comfort or comfort some sick folk till lunch time, when he is cast up again. Sir Angus is in the library below talking to the Squire, and taking things easy, I fancy I say, Ellis, what a nice chap he is, after all! Why, sent for me when I came in with his sister a short time ago, and reminded me of her invitation to the Bee worth party on Monday so frankly that I could scarcely realize my luck. He's not a bit stiff, and it would surprise me were I to get on with him swimmingly."

"That's well."

"Isn't it? Do you know, but for Bracy Lushet feel pretty jolly. It seems as if I had at last got to the sunny side of the wall. Doesn't it?"

